

MY EYE IS IN LOVE

*Frederick Truitt*

MACMILLAN

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**MY EYE IS IN LOVE**





# MY EYE IS IN LOVE

*Revelations on the Act of Seeing by Drawing*

*Frederick Franck*

*The Macmillan Company*

N E W Y O R K

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*For my wife, CLASKE, who is happy when I draw!*





Aug 2 1959 4 am  
St. John's, Nfld.

Frank

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THIS BOOK RESULTED FROM AN ARTICLE "IN PRAISE OF Drawing," written for *Art in America*, in which I tried to compress in very few pages observations and meditations on the impulse to draw and on the spirit and process of the activity called drawing. During the discussion of this article with the editors of *Art in America*, the ideas embodied in this book became clarified in my mind and work on it started almost immediately. I am profoundly grateful, therefore, for the inspiration and encouragement Mrs. Jean Lipman and Mr. Anthony Bower gave me. I am also much indebted for permission to use reproductions of drawings in the collections of Fogg Art Museum, Museum of Modern Art, Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Carnegie Institute and De Young Memorial Museum. To the private collectors who allowed the use of their drawings also my warmest thanks.

## PROLOGUE

MY EYE IS IN LOVE WITH THIS WORLD. MY EYE IS IN LOVE with its own perception of life. It affirms and rejoices. It is alive.

Through my eye I relate to the world around me. The images on its retina are so poignant that I have to draw. For where the eye in love perceives, the hand involuntarily follows the forms as if to encompass them. Here is the beginning of drawing.

To me then, drawing is a way of living, a way toward life's fullness. It is not just a technique and certainly not mere skill. It is a total response. When I see a thing my first desire is not to possess what I see, or to eat it, to buy it, to name, to classify, or to change it. My first desire is to draw it.

Political man, economic man, historical man, may well have contempt for this apparently senseless response to life. To me drawing, like singing or dancing, is an activity which temporarily delivers me from history. Maybe it transcends it.

Drawing, while born from awareness, leads to an even greater awareness which involves me totally, yet impartially with all that passes before my eye: with mountains and human faces, city streets and humblest weeds, nude bodies, and the pebbles and shells of the seashore.

What started as a book about drawing became a book about seeing and hence about being humanly aware and alive.

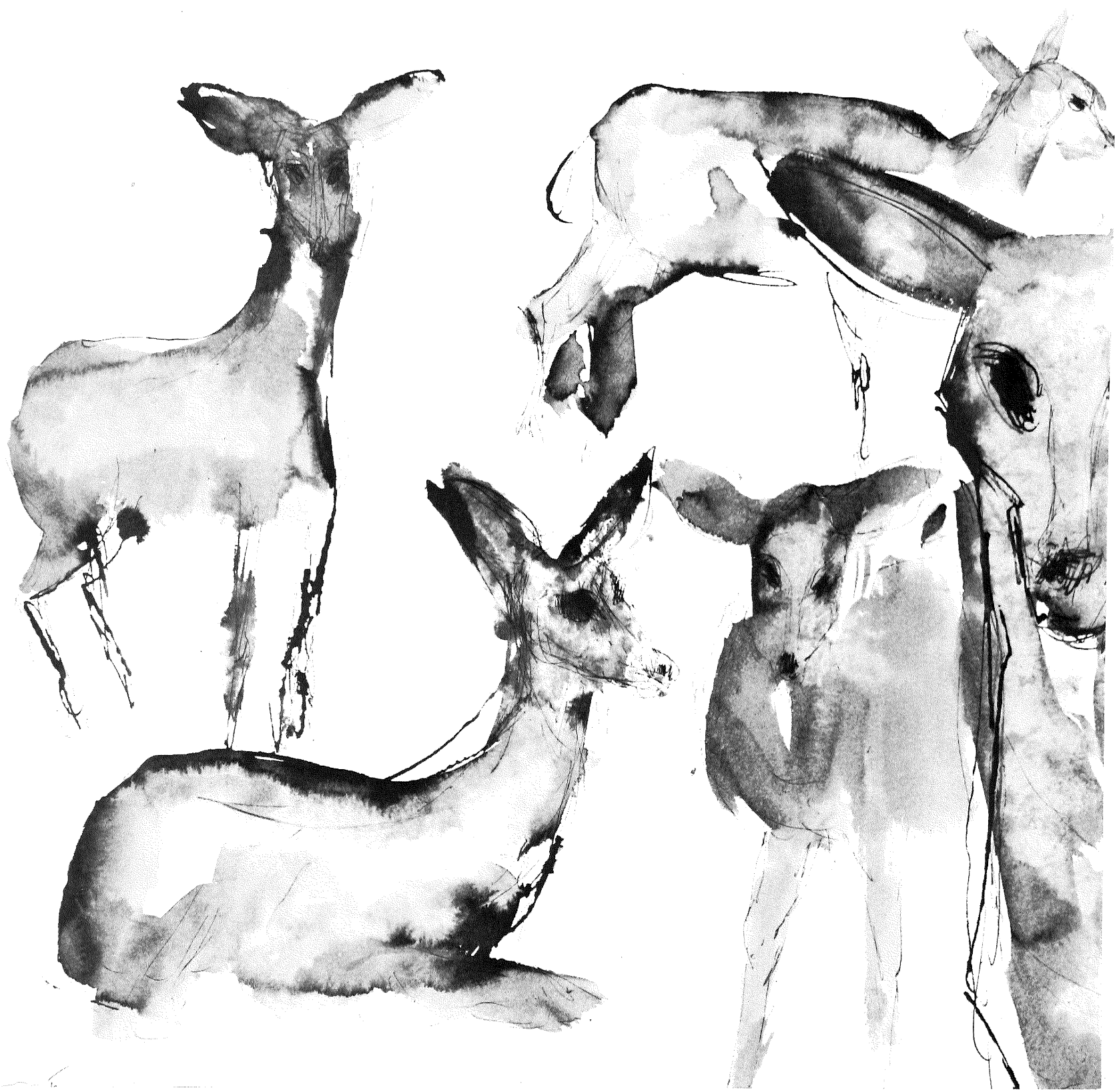







**MY EYE IS IN LOVE**





*Music is feeling then, not sound. . .*

WALLACE STEVENS



**I** WROTE THIS BOOK IN PRAISE OF DRAWING, BUT NOT IN praise of my own drawing. For, after all, I might as well have written a text and illustrated it by reproductions of Brueghel or Bonnard, Rembrandt or Renoir, Dürer or Delacroix, Piero della Francesca or Picasso instead of my own.

The praise of drawing might then have been more compelling, and yet this would have been a different kind of book: just for a while the latest of a long series of anthologies tied together with yet another string of opinions.

That Da Vinci did draw well needs no further words. That Jongkind, like so many others, was inseparable from the little *carnet*, in which he jotted down with unconcern and infallible precision whatever caught his eye, that Delacroix drew incessantly, that Redon sketched in humble adoration rocks and trees and grasses, that Hokusai at the age of ninety began to feel some hope that, given more time, he might yet learn to draw—all this we can find in the literature of art.

Everything that can be drawn, from Dürer's grasses to Van Gogh's fields winged over by birds, has been drawn from earliest time. Everyman drew everything. We only have to discover a grotto in Lascaux to find that bulls were drawn masterfully thirty thousand years ago, or penetrate into the Bushmen country of the Kalahari Desert to find that man, the symbol-producing animal, drew his images on rock walls (and, no doubt, on less time-proof materials) long before he felt even the need to record history.

- 4 It is often said that these prehistoric masters drew their quarry or their totems as an act of worship, as magic incantation, exhortation, propitiation, supplication. But at the same time their drawings bear witness to that same human compulsion toward pictorial symbolization that still activates my own hand. Their eyes, too, were in love.

And in this activity of eye and hand I have found that there is an inexhaustible well of joy. At a time in which we and our world are threatened by total, instant destruction, I have learned to dive into the reality of my life by drawing. I too find it to be an act of worship or, perhaps, conjuration. I drew the grasses behind a motel in Vermont, a nestling human habitat in Brittany, the vineyards around a house in Provence, the low Holland sky from a train, a mountaintop from a terrifying old plane over Ethiopia, and each time I felt in absolute contact with the center of life, fearless and filled with joy. In the hubbub of New York I drew faces in a park, a dying man in a hospital ward, people in a subway—and in doing so came to say yes to the baffling city. The majestic rocky coast of the Pacific in drawing revealed its transiency, and a baboon facing me in the Congo spoke of eternity: I drew rock and ape in joy. Wherever I drew and while drawing, I became part of, I participated in, and identified with, my world. Instead of worrying about the bomb, I began to learn to live with it. As long as in drawing I can still say yes to the city, to the shells and the beaches, to a jungle path in Nigeria, I say yes to life. In this book I want to communicate the joy of the magic incantation that is drawing.

My drawings are certainly not offered in competition with the masters of prehistory or those of the seventeenth, the nineteenth, or even the twentieth century. Without apology they are offered as one man's way to draw and to come to terms with his existence.

And if this way of coming to terms with human existence be deemed too childish, senseless, or absurd,





France VIII. 16. 1900









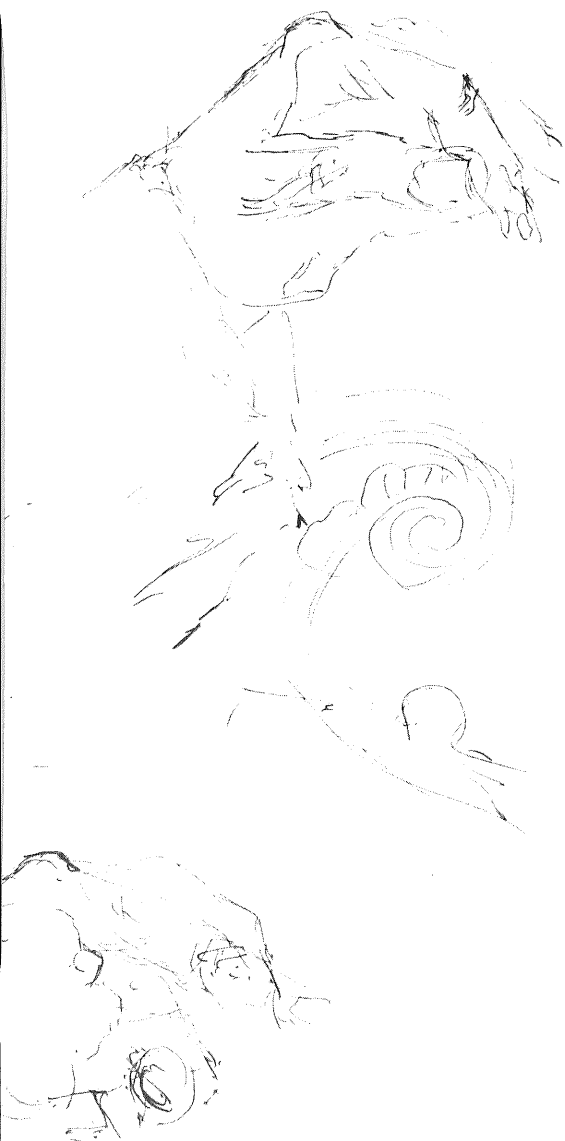


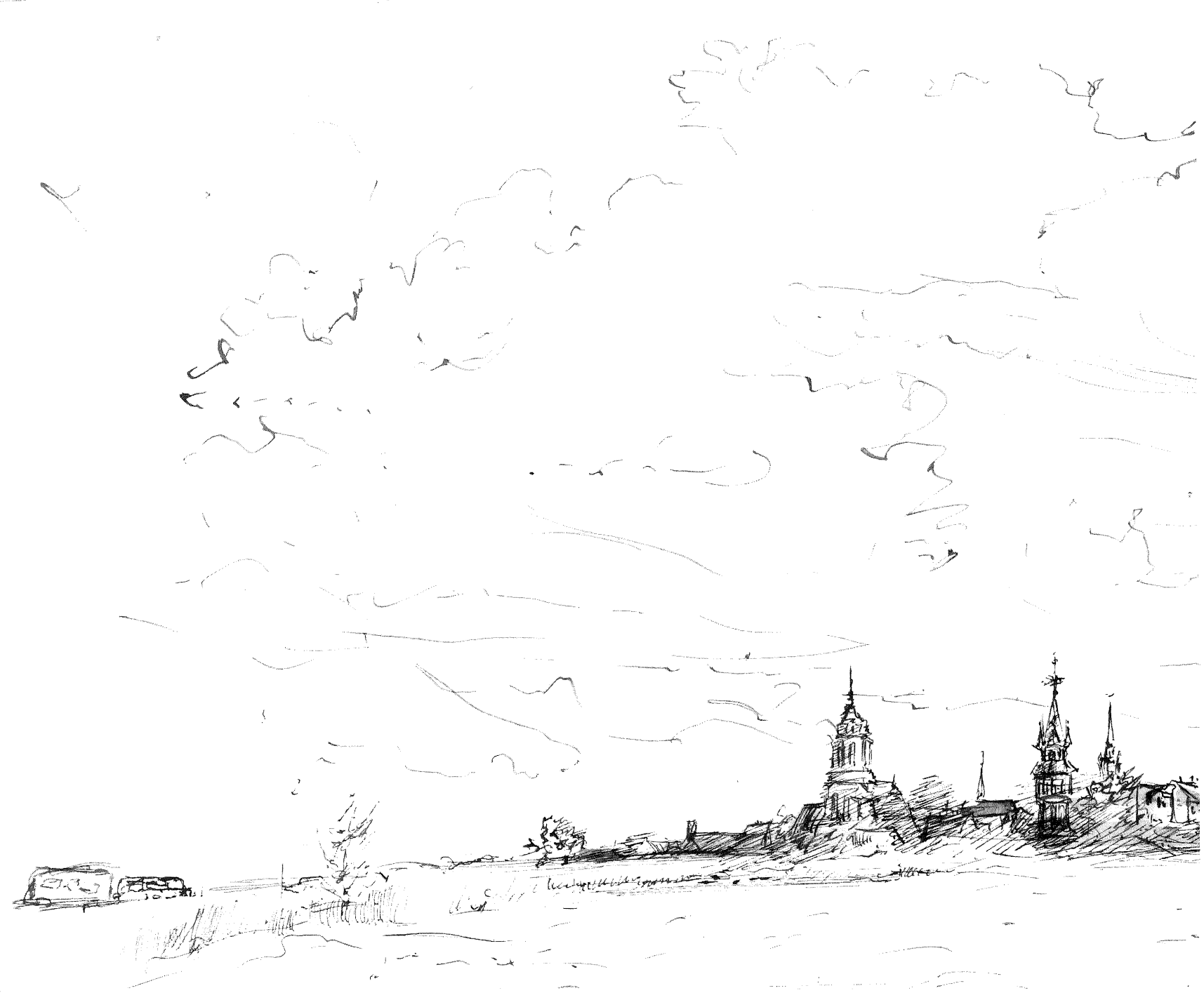
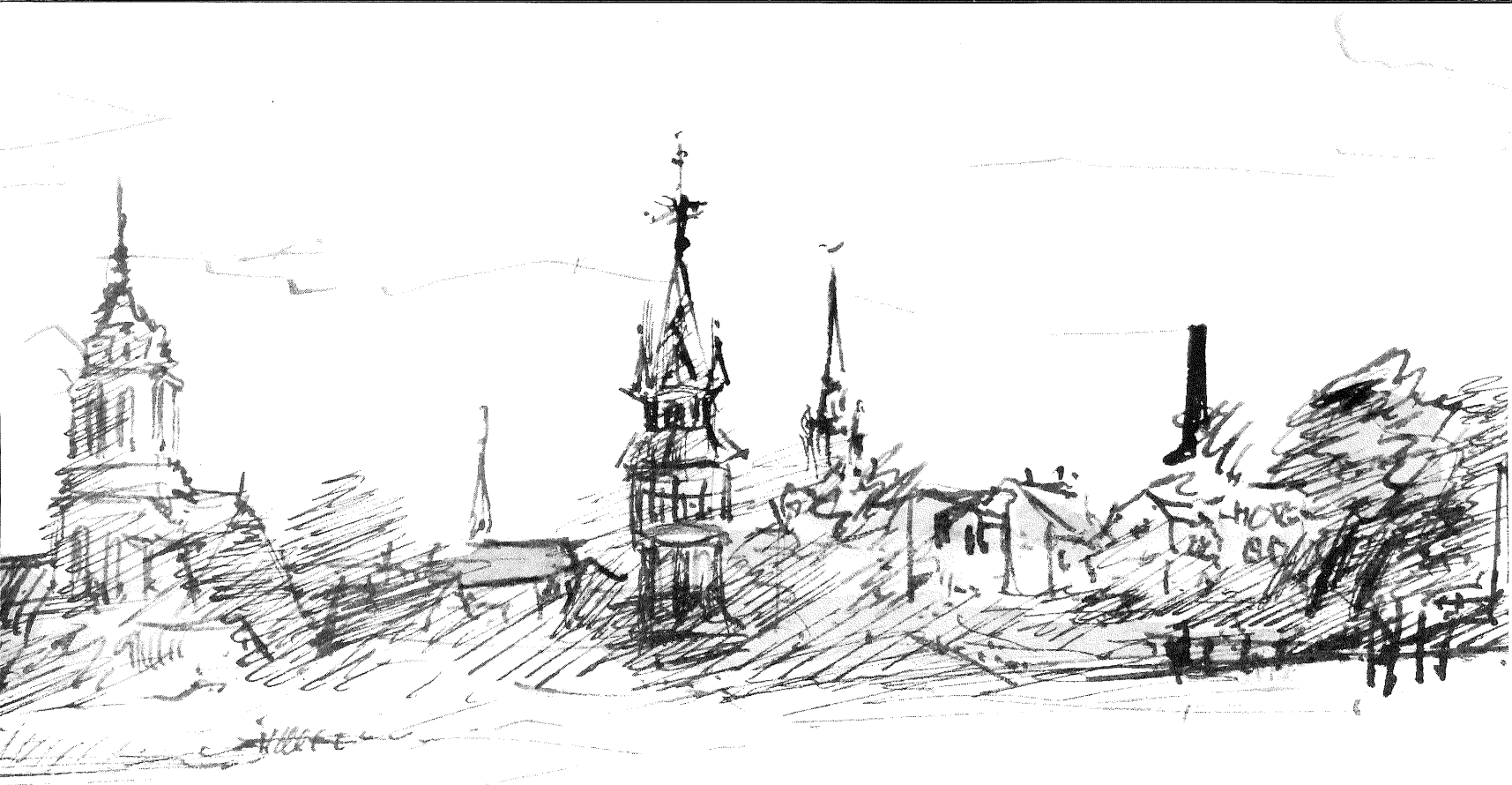


it is my belief that senseless as it may be, it is immensely I I  
less absurd than to focus one's life on the production  
and sale of more and more things, or on the production  
of criminally insane scientific methods of destroying  
life in the delusion thereby to create or protect life.  
I offer drawing then as an antidote to the insanity that  
takes life for granted. And I describe my own adventure  
not out of sheer egoism, but out of the faith that I can  
share my awe at being alive, and bring into awareness  
a treasure we have in common.

Sometimes the relevance of art to the problems of our  
time is called into question. No wonder. The whole  
epoch is focused on technological achievement, busily  
realizing dreams of interplanetary weekends. The  
art produced after Picasso and Joyce (both drawing on  
inexhaustible resources of an unbroken culture) proudly  
rejected all preoccupation with tradition. The artist  
with the infatuated eye then may appear as an ana-  
chronism, his nonutilitarian eye as obsolete as a horse-  
drawn streetcar. Yet obsolete or not, my eye perceives  
and sets the hand in motion. Thus for certain human  
beings, graphic symbolization of their perception is  
still an integral part of the process of living and of the  
fulfillment of their potentialities. There is the absurd  
question sometimes asked by pedants, "Has art after  
all brought anything of value since Holbein?" ("Since  
Rembrandt? Since Renoir?"). They believe that art is a  
making of things, instead of a process integral in  
certain individuals, a process that results only inciden-  
tally in triptychs and cathedrals, and in oratoria. Because  
the root of art is Epiphany: the inevitable delight  
at the realization of being alive, being able to see  
and to feel. If the art of our time is kaleidoscopic,  
it merely reflects the confusion of values, the baffle-  
ment in the face of the breakdown of the symbolic  
universes of traditional religion and traditional  
science.

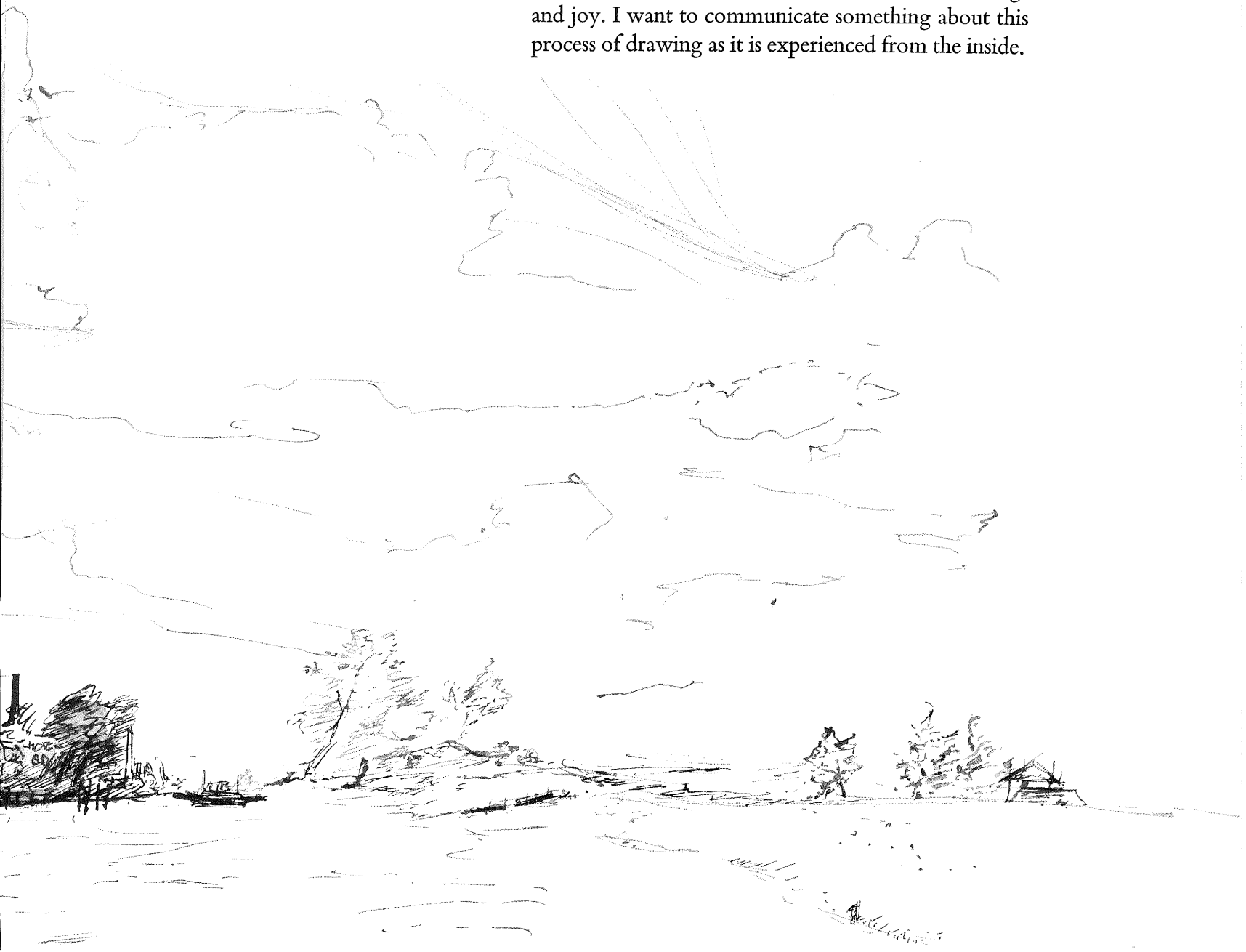
A result of the breakdown of all tradition is that the  
artist is now faced with a terrible and unlimited  
freedom. In reality, however, he can only choose to





reflect either the tremendous upheaval of his surroundings and his time or the eternal process of which he is himself an incarnation. Those who identify with the upheavals will probably scoff at all that follows, as they may ridicule the idea that all art aspires to "High Art," an art of the whole man, an art in which the senses as well as the spirit find delight and fulfillment, an art then that disdains to be "exciting" but aspires to be noble. I 3

I do not claim that my views are authoritative. They have only a provisional validity, even for myself, for I hope to grow to deeper understandings. I do not speak as either an art historian or a critic—so often fellows who know the words, but cannot hear the music. I am speaking simply as a man who has done a good deal of drawing and who has found in the process that everyday reality has become more and more filled with wonder, life more and more filled with meaning and joy. I want to communicate something about this process of drawing as it is experienced from the inside.



*The way to do is to be.*

LAO-TZU

## II

ONCE I THOUGHT I WANTED TO POSSESS ALL THE WOMEN in the world: thin dark ones, plump blondes, long-nosed, pear-breasted, snub-nosed hippy ones, cool classical aphrodites, long-legged elegant deer, dumpy earthbound peasants, budding pubers, and ripe full-bodied matrons. Then, fortunately, I discovered that I could do with a limited number indeed, and just wanted to draw them all!

This did not apply only to women. Drawing became my way of seeing: I must draw whatever I see in order to make it my own. Thus the world becomes my world, in which I am free. Drawing grasps things and beings, yet "lets them be." There may be many other ways to liberation; this is one of them and it happens to be mine. Thus, drawing becomes even more than a way of seeing, it becomes a way toward life, even a way of life. Indeed, it becomes a way of union with my fellow creatures and with nature. Drawing in this sense is a religious discipline, a probing of reality by mind and eye and hand combined.

What, then, is this kind of drawing, this probing for truth? It is the seismographic movement of the pen caressing the living form. In drawing, all form becomes living form.

The truth of drawing is another truth than that of photography. In photography it is indeed the eye that hunts, the intuition that chooses, but it is a machine that catches, a machine so constructed that it can project an image onto a sensitive plate by means of a lens patterned on that of the human eye. The resulting image



Portrait of Jacques Lipchitz  
by the artist

Jacques Lipchitz in his studio

I 6 of reality, whatever its validity, is a shadow, mechanically and chemically produced. I can well imagine camera lenses patterned on my dog's eye, on a fly's eye. They would give me pictures of what falls on the dog's retina, on the fly's retina. Pictures of limited validity, for what do I know of the consciousness that has to interpret these images to dog or fly? Looking at a color photograph of a landscape I know well, I usually feel quite alien to it. The color too is an average color, an acceptable common-denominator color. But color as I really perceive it in the landscape is deeply influenced by my mood. When my mind is dull the brightest green becomes drab. When my mind is open the grayest day offers a delicious variety of color.

Drawing is a totally different process, the whole person is involved: the eye perceives, intellect and feeling are taut. A reflex arc goes from eye to hand through the whole body and somehow through all that is called mind and heart. All the hand does is precipitate a line, provided it obeys perfectly and is not interfered with by the meddling, cheating ego. All progress in drawing is the exercising of the reflex arc and the short-circuiting of the conscious personality. All the hand has to be is the unquestioning seismograph that notes down something, the meaning of which it knows not. The less the conscious personality of the artist interferes, the more truthful and personal the tracing becomes. True drawing is always original in this sense, but it is a kind of originality only perceptible to the aware observer, not the kind of originality that the ego strains for.

During the act of drawing, a sleeping pauper, Albert Schweitzer, a gull, Dimitri Mitropoulos, a flying pelican, a cabbage and a cardinal, a leaf of grass and Jacques Lipchitz become equivalent.

Where painting may consciously derive from art, drawing cannot. It is always reaction to life. In order to draw, one must have the capacity for experience, the capacity to react to life, the capacity to let the eye be steady and to allow all to pass before it while















2 2 accepting it impartially. In drawing, I become aware of, part of, even identical with, all that passes before the steady eye.

The more I strive for originality in drawing, the more it eludes me, the more trite becomes the product. We are so afraid to be ourselves that we are rarely authentic, and in straining for originality we are bound to copy. It becomes a mannered handwriting, part of some convention or other. It becomes pseudo drawing, in which self-indulgence and the addition of what may seem interesting devices addle the privacy and truth that are the essence of the act of drawing.

Here I use the word essence, which is one of those words abused in esthetic jargon. There are no essences to be drawn or painted consciously. The sphere is not the essence of an apple, its apple-ness is, as Chardin knew. Movement is not the essence of a girl, girl-ness is, as Degas knew. To find the essence, the artist needs the grace to obey the reflex with ever-increasing sensitivity, coordination, and freedom. The reflex begins in identification: I have to become the apple, then draw the apple, yet remain myself. What applies to the apple, of course, applies to a figure or a crowd. Where identification is missing, I stumble, and find I cannot draw a line.

Drawing may begin in Eros: some nudes are a mere sexual caress, but who stops there becomes a pornographer. Development consists in moving toward *gape*; the indiscriminate acceptance of all that *is*, the impartial loving that makes the old and worn as worthy as the young and beautiful. This is what imbues Rembrandt's nudes with deepest compassion. As drawing develops toward *gape*, it often becomes "the art of leaving out," but it can always be felt that the deep structures as well as the skin have been touched by the fingertips.

Only this seismographic kind of drawing is to me true drawing, be it by Da Vinci, Ingres, Picasso, Degas,

Goya, or Chagall. Whether the seismograph registers 2 3  
directly from nature or from the after-image in the  
artist's mind is immaterial.

The clichés of contemporary criticism, such as "decorative," "illustrative," "anecdotal," "documentary," "reportorial," "literary," are irrelevant. These are descriptive terms, and to use them lazily as evaluations is both inaccurate and misleading. We should refuse to be inhibited by these semantic and academic bugaboos.

There is no "pure" drawing, there is only true drawing and pseudo drawing. Pseudo drawing is all drawing that adds devices to the activity described above. It is drawing made "interesting." It is the "finished," "polished" drawing; the more it is "finished" the more pseudo it gets. It is the "stylized" drawing, the "exciting" drawing, which concentrates on the stimulation of the audience instead of on the artist's total identification with what he is drawing. Pseudo drawings may also depend for effect on exotic appeal or surrealist trickery. They may be marvelous artifacts; I cannot accept them as drawings. What I call true drawing, may be quite clumsy, whereas pseudo drawing may be wonderfully clever. Van Gogh's drawings are often awkward, they are never pseudo. Dali's drawings are never awkward!

The contact needed for drawing then is not merely visual. It is total, and it establishes immediate and reciprocal relationships. Wherever I have drawn, in the harbor of Accra, on Welfare Island, in leper villages in the Congo, or in native huts in Ethiopia, I have made friends. Human beings and even animals have reacted to the absolute concentration and acceptance that were part of drawing them.

There is a fascination for even the most primitive onlooker in the magic of the human hand writing recognizable forms, re-creating a little universe on a piece of paper. I was deeply moved by the revelation











Panel 16

Subway Station



50th Street subway station



via Talash village Jordan

that children in African villages immediately recognized what I had drawn: human eyes totally untrained in art appeared to be able to read those symbols of ink on paper instantly, naturally, and without effort. I once heard a famous nonobjective painter say, "I want to see the way a primitive bushman sees, not as concept but as sheer perception." I was enchanted by the revelation that these children of the jungle villages who had never seen art or an artist in their lives, interpreted spontaneously the lines and dots I was making as an image of their world. They confirmed that I was handling a universal language, the same language that may have been old when the bulls were drawn in Aurignac, some thirty thousand years ago. Standing in a grotto in Lascaux, I had the feeling "Here are my ancestors." Life has not changed except in nonessentials. Life and death are still with us. There is no doubt that there is a future in this kind of drawing, if human life continues on earth. There is a future in this pictorial communication with self, which, incidentally, communicates with a Bantu child, a New York taxi driver, a schoolteacher, or with luck a collector. To draw is not only joy, it is at the same time struggle, tension and despair. But, more important, it brings the artist liberation from compulsive concern with "style" and spurious originality, from worry about "being of one's time." Drawing unconstrainedly, I cannot be anything but myself, product of my time as well as of my culture, my whole heredity. In the eternal stream of forms I am just one, the one who notes them down.

*An easy way to make the acquaintance of a city is to find out how one works, loves, and dies in it.*

ALBERT CAMUS

# III

WHEN I FIRST CAME TO NEW YORK FROM EUROPE I WAS, of course, baffled by the metropolis. I started to paint it, and did some highly ambitious architectural compositions. Soon I learned that New York is unpaintable in realistic architectural terms. The architecture is purely utilitarian and not intended to be much more enduring than a tent. The most solid and solemn Park Avenue mansion has barely had time to gather some patina, when it is sold for a small profit and torn down. The few remaining architectural masterpieces testifying to a comparatively recent, but for New York, a prehistoric past, are sold to make way for glass-and-alloy cages, which will be torn down again in their turn, when the people able to pay exorbitant rents for being cooped up in them move to yet newer prestige-boxes. Even the vehicles that throng the streets become obsolete so fast that before your painting is dry enough for varnishing you discover you have a period piece on your hands, a period piece without grace. New York is not buildings, New York is people.

It seems impossible to come to grips with the rushing crowds of New York. On a walk along Fifth Avenue from Forty-second Street to Fifty-ninth Street you are confronted by a numberless throng. Numberless pairs of unseeing eyes pursue private mechanical hares, the men with their attache cases stumble over women whose instincts suddenly make them veer uncontrollably across the sidewalks toward some shop window, like cats pursuing mice across four-lane highways. In subways men and women stand ready to trample one another, plunge down into their horror newspapers





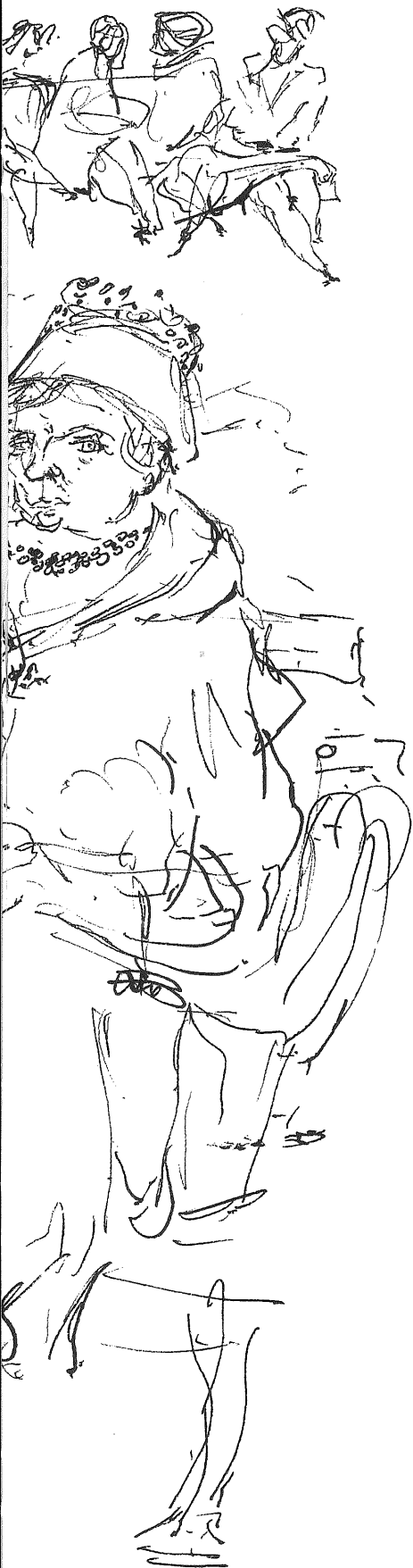




FIREHOSC







with the lethal headlines, which alternately proclaim, "Mr. K. Threatens Holocaust" or "Blonde Raped at Bottom of Well."

3 5

But as I became used to New York and began to draw it, I discovered it to be a gigantic studio. In the subway the harassed humans sometimes calm down and stare before them, humanly, even mildly. I used the subway as a training ground; being all eye I tried to look at each face from the inside out. Instead of just looking at the face, I wondered: What do these eyes see? I often had the sensation that looking through my eyes and through the eyes that met them, Something was looking at Itself.

Emerging from the subway, I saw the dusk on Sixth Avenue folding all that is separate in the glow of its embrace. In the parks lone old men were keeping rendezvous with their pigeons; as I drew them, they became more than figurants. I saw at the bus terminal deserted old people sitting on the waiting-room benches, hoping to make some human contact. I saw at the Plaza Hotel a dowager laboriously combing her bag for a dime to give to the regal doorman. I saw at the Stock Exchange a joyous shaft of light falling unnoticed over the milling human heap on the floor. What I first dismissed uneasily as a bum became a desperate old contemporary reading his found newspaper in a ferry terminal. I saw a Puerto Rican girl in her Sunday finery sitting motionless and amazed at her own beauty on a bench in Central Park, waiting for life to touch her. From my studio window in Greenwich Village I saw the old Italians sunning themselves, debating, and spoiling their American grandchildren. The city masses had dissolved. They had existed only as illusions, hallucinations wrought by the bombardment on retina and mind of too multitudinous impressions. I found man again. Man in the singular. For man in the plural does not exist. Man in the plural is our cruelest delusion and abomination, root of all our callousness and indifference. This delusion, like all the follies of our condition, can be overcome only by a sudden insight





3 8 of vision, which reveals only individuals, each one of total interest, worthy of all one's passionate attention. While drawing a so-called commonplace man one notices that he is supremely complex and unique: an invaluable contemporary! I catch myself thinking: how fortunate that you are here, alive at the same time as I. All that normally appears indifferent, his smile, his curse, his prejudices, do not become criteria for judging him but integral aspects of that astonishing human phenomenon before me.

This insight first came to me while I was drawing in a remote African village. It came again while I was drawing city crowds in New York.

When drawing a group of people on a street, there seems to be a deeply buried preconceived scheme in which all the individuals, weaving in and out of my field of vision, fall into place all by themselves and form an organic, pictorial whole.

In bad drawings the parts stay parts. The bad drawings happen when, as I start to draw, the world remains closed to me. I am a mere onlooker, "He is Italian," "She looks ridiculous," goes through my head. Then a woman trips on the sidewalk or a pigeon flies up, and all description ceases and the pen imperceptibly starts to move by itself. As long as I recognize objects and name them, I am impotent. There is no greater contrast than between recognizing and seeing. Drawing is, before all else, seeing.

The seeing evolves as I draw and go on drawing. Each time I start from scratch, as if I have never drawn before. Each time the individual forms with their definitions and concepts interpose themselves between eye and hand, and only as the drawing continues against all the inhibitions, all the suffering of inadequacy, all the temptations to stop, can the miracle be coaxed to happen. Then the line of the goat's back will continue into the arm of the girl; the head of the man who moved away will receive the body of the fellow who



- 4 o replaced him. Not only lines continue from one body to another, the perception does. What I perceive, and hence can draw, is not a collection or sequence of individual forms but a continuum of living matter, of life itself. This experience or revelation may continue for hours. One morning, after I had been drawing well, I had to address a woman's club, and while talking I had the feeling that in front of me, yet including me, was a sea of living protoplasm from which individual heads emerged as mere aspects of the whole. One of the heads was the one that was talking. It was my own.

While I am drawing, people inevitably come and look. In the beginning, being watched may destroy my concentration. Once I am "in it," the onlookers do not matter any more. For the onlookers the drawing is a fascinating process. And no wonder. For them a drawing has always been "a picture," once it is framed even "a painting," something precipitated full-grown like a photograph on a Polaroid film. Now they actually see the hand moving and the amazing process fulfilling itself.



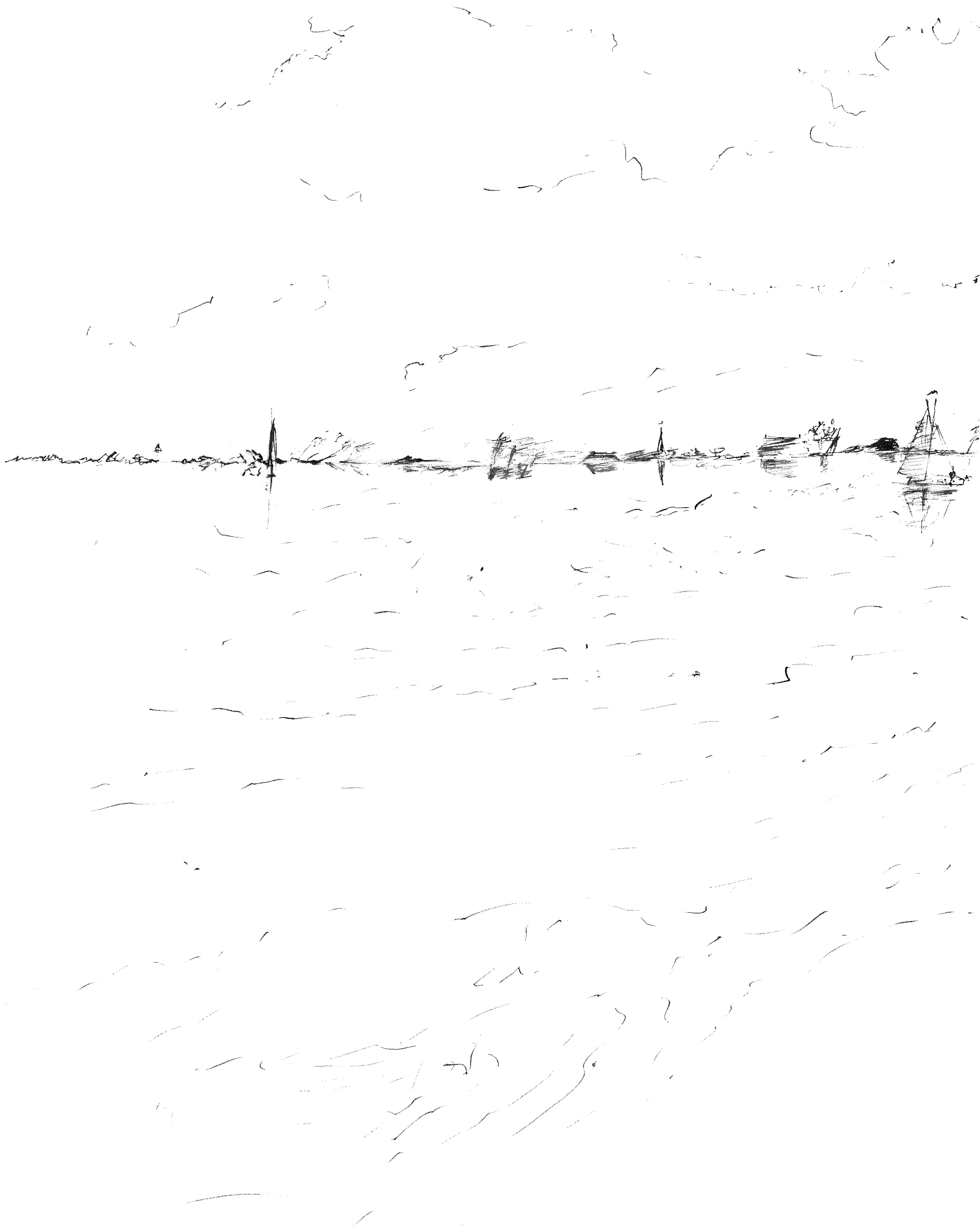
*We were driven out of Paradise, but Paradise was not destroyed.*

FRANZ KAFKA

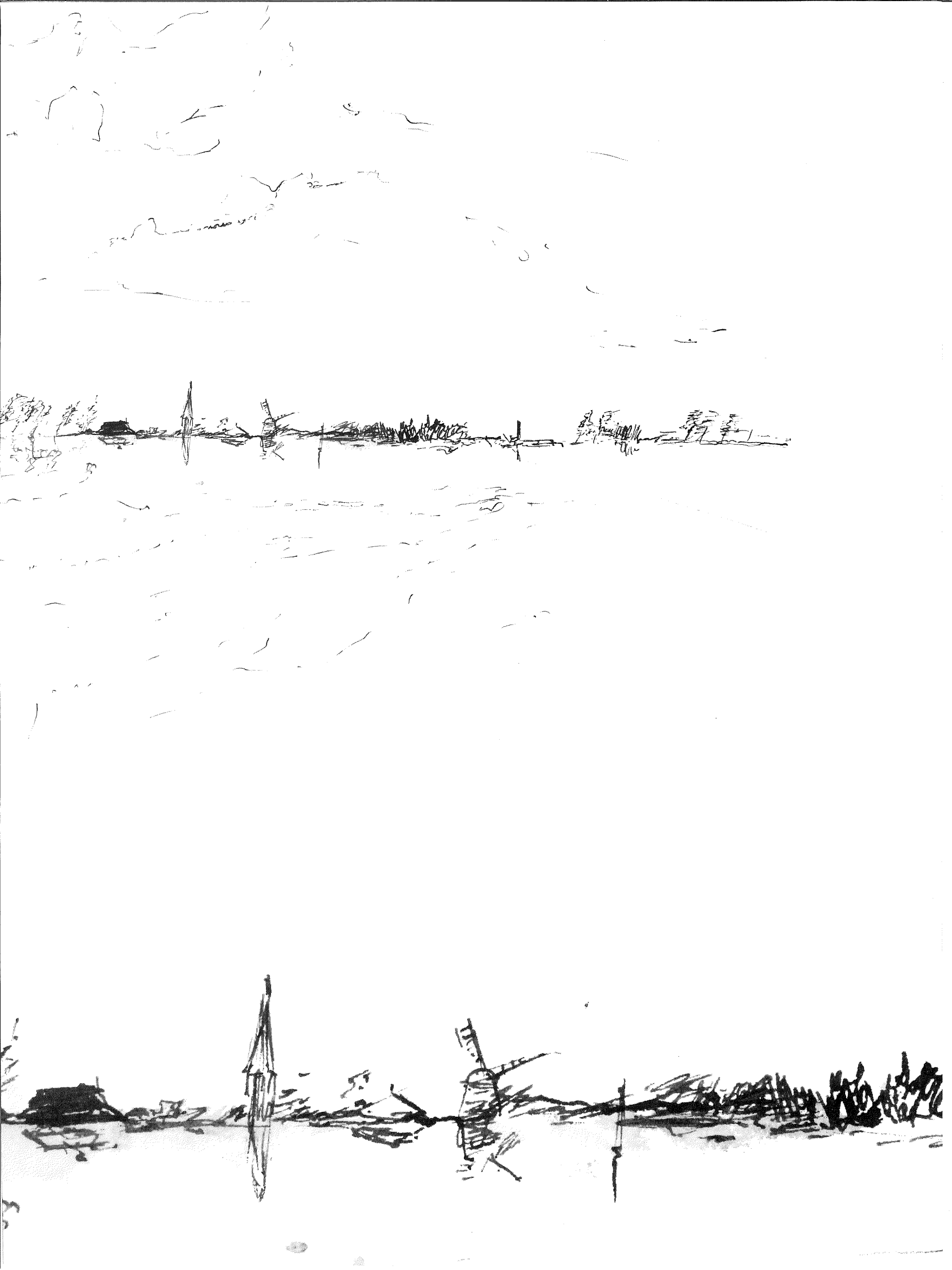
I HAVE SAT DOWN TO DRAW IN THE OLD PORT OF Marseilles, in the camel market at Omdurman, on the beach of Moclips, Washington, on the steps of a church in Mexico, in a dugout canoe on the Ogoué River. One thing these places have in common, I learned: they are all on earth. This may be an obvious truth, but every truism is a platitude until it becomes a living experience. While drawing, I discovered that everywhere under one's feet are the pebbles, the sand, the mud, and the sparse or opulent weeds and grasses. Everywhere in the distance the forms coalesce, bathed in a haze, drowned in a glare. The whole vision may be enveloped in soft and humid vapor, in limpid morning light, or in boiling, trembling heat. Some of these atmospheres are part of one's hereditary make-up, and those one renders easily and spontaneously.

I grew up in the vaporous, rainy atmosphere of Holland, and still the somber, rainy days, when everyone is grumbling, are the ones that fill me with deep contentment, a feeling of being at home. Fatherland, home, remains where the eye first opened to perceive and love the world. To the painter this fatherland has nothing to do with the disastrous political concepts of cannibalistic nationalism; the fatherland consists of those four or five square miles where he roamed in childhood and found himself confronted by the miracles of light, of earth, of water, and of trees. Home is too, where, for the child, the stillness of a morning had this special quality that announced "Today is Sunday"; an atmosphere of special, starched immobility in the air, a slower pulsing of the sunlight. It is where he suddenly felt a tree growing from its own roots, the life force

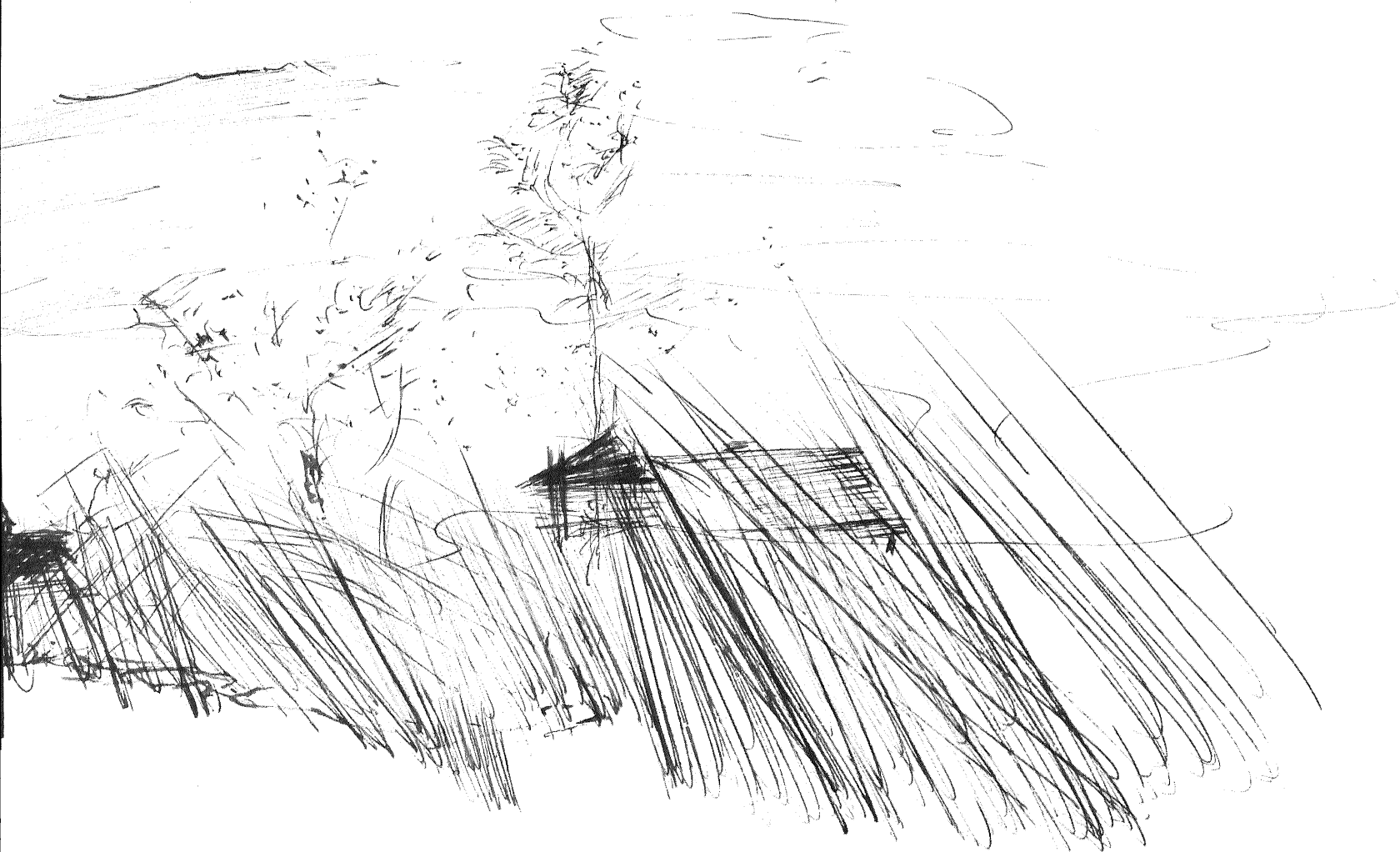
## IV



Mr. Clark 24 July 1962 Stokermar. France







- 4 6 pushing itself upward and twisting and turning its branches against invisible pressures and resistances.

He may have touched that tree, and amazed at his own emotion he may have kissed it, and in that embrace he became an artist: that strange composite of mysticism and sensuousness that secretes art. In the child's perception the destiny of the artist is determined. Was not Rembrandt's lifelong fascination with chiaroscuro born from seeing the shafts of sunlight piercing the darkness of his father's mill? Did not Jongkind's water-logged atmospheres of Holland, Boudin's revelations of the transparency of the skies of Honfleur, Cézanne's immobile luminosities of Mont Sainte-Victoire stem from their childhood revelations?

In my own life I have been tossed from continent to continent. I am by no means a traveler by inclination, or a cosmopolitan by temperament. It just so happens that we live in a century where one can leave it to fate to arrange for one's globetrotting. I was born in that extreme southern tip of Holland—a country that is so small that the terms north and south are mere titles of courtesy—which sticks out like an appendix between Germany and Belgium and where Dutch, Flemish, German, and Walloon cultures meet and mingle. In 1914 I was five years old. I remember the day that I walked at my grandfather's hand to the city square of Maastricht. The bells of all the churches were clanging. People were gathered in groups, reading proclamations or bulletins pasted on the walls. War had been declared. Then the booming of the big guns began, very close by. The German armies that August started their attack on the fortifications of Liège at the small town of Visé, just ten miles away. I knew Visé: we went there on Sundays in a *rijtuig*, a landau drawn by two black geldings, to eat goose and fried potatoes on a terrace along the river Meuse. From my attic window I could see a red glow over the sky. "Visé is burning," my mother said to my father. I do not remember the expression on their faces, but I remember the chill and the horror. Visé is burning!

The big cannons boomed, day and night. It must have 4 7  
been over soon, the battle of Visé, but in my memory  
the sky stayed red and the guns boomed all through  
my childhood. And although I lived on neutral ground,  
one of the first bombs from one of those open-cockpit  
biplanes fell in the playground of my school and  
made a big crater. Every day endless columns of refugees  
came through Maastricht, carrying their belongings  
and their babies on their backs, *avant-garde* of all the  
refugees of the twentieth century. I sat at the second-  
floor window and watched a company of interned  
German cavalry on their fiery horses passing by and an  
English detachment, strayed over the frontier, saluting  
a funeral. I saw the wounded on open carts and trucks,  
who were somehow transported over the border, and  
always those endless streams of people.

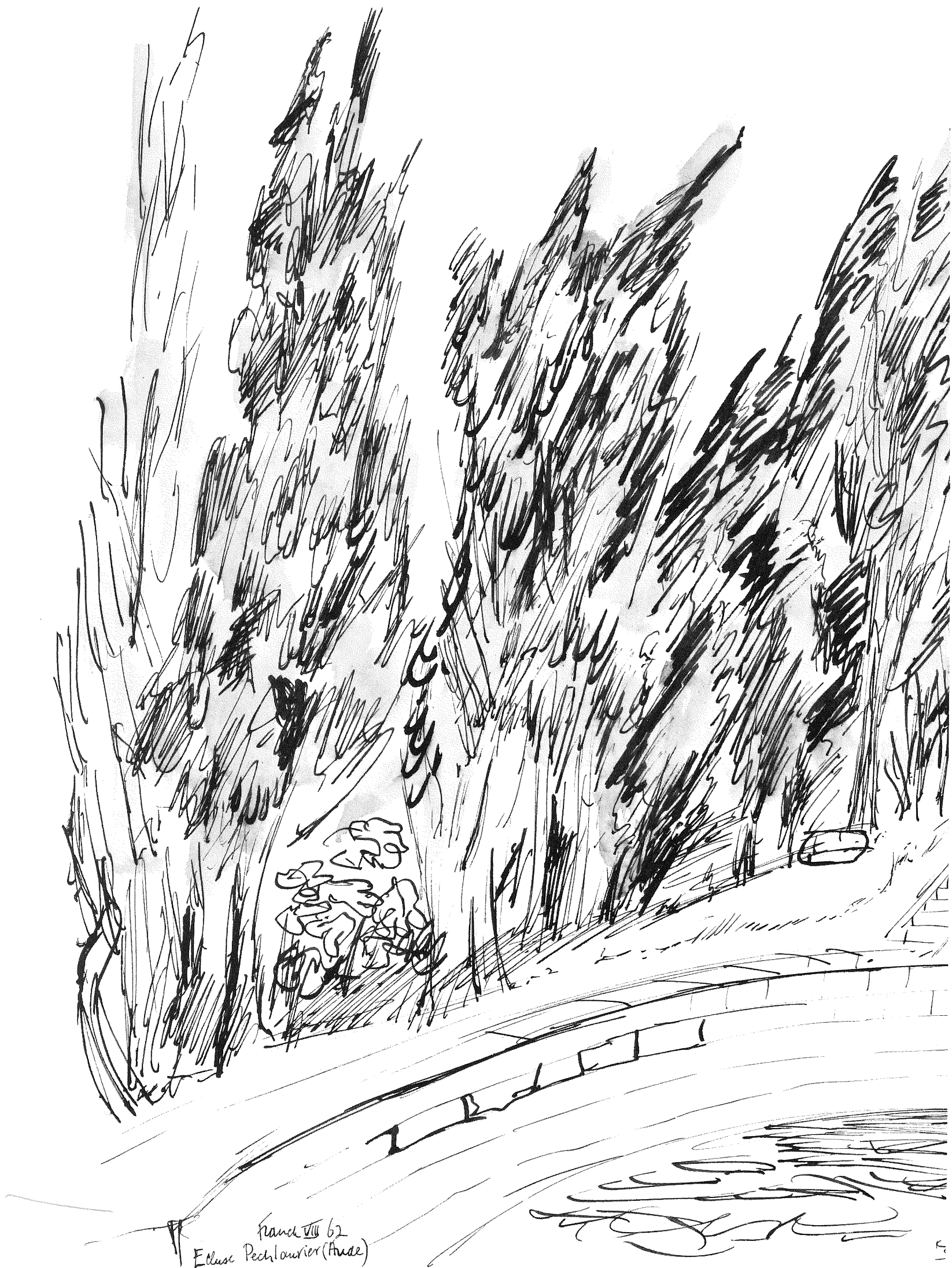
I was eating grapes at the window, while my mother,  
like all the other women of Maastricht, was cooking  
porridge for the refugees. I saw an old man with a small  
child on his shoulders. He was carrying a canary in a  
cage. He looked up at me. I burst into tears and threw  
my bunch of grapes at him in a helpless gesture of  
pity. It landed in the gutter.

The booming cannons and fleeing refugees of that  
August struck a horror and a phobia of war deep into  
my heart, which I was never to outgrow. When I was  
nineteen, and new forts were being built close to  
Maastricht near Visé again, my mind was made up:  
I must get out.

Although the Second World War was not to start until  
ten years later, for me it started in 1929, when the  
forts of the Albert Canal were being built. While  
waiting for the explosions, I constantly studied atlases  
to make up my mind where to go. I accepted and  
rejected the Indies, Central Africa, Tristan da Cunha,  
New Zealand. Then I decided I would go to America.

But my father died and I compromised with my  
mother's plea not to go so far away and settled in





France VIII 62  
Ecluse Pechlaurier (Aude)



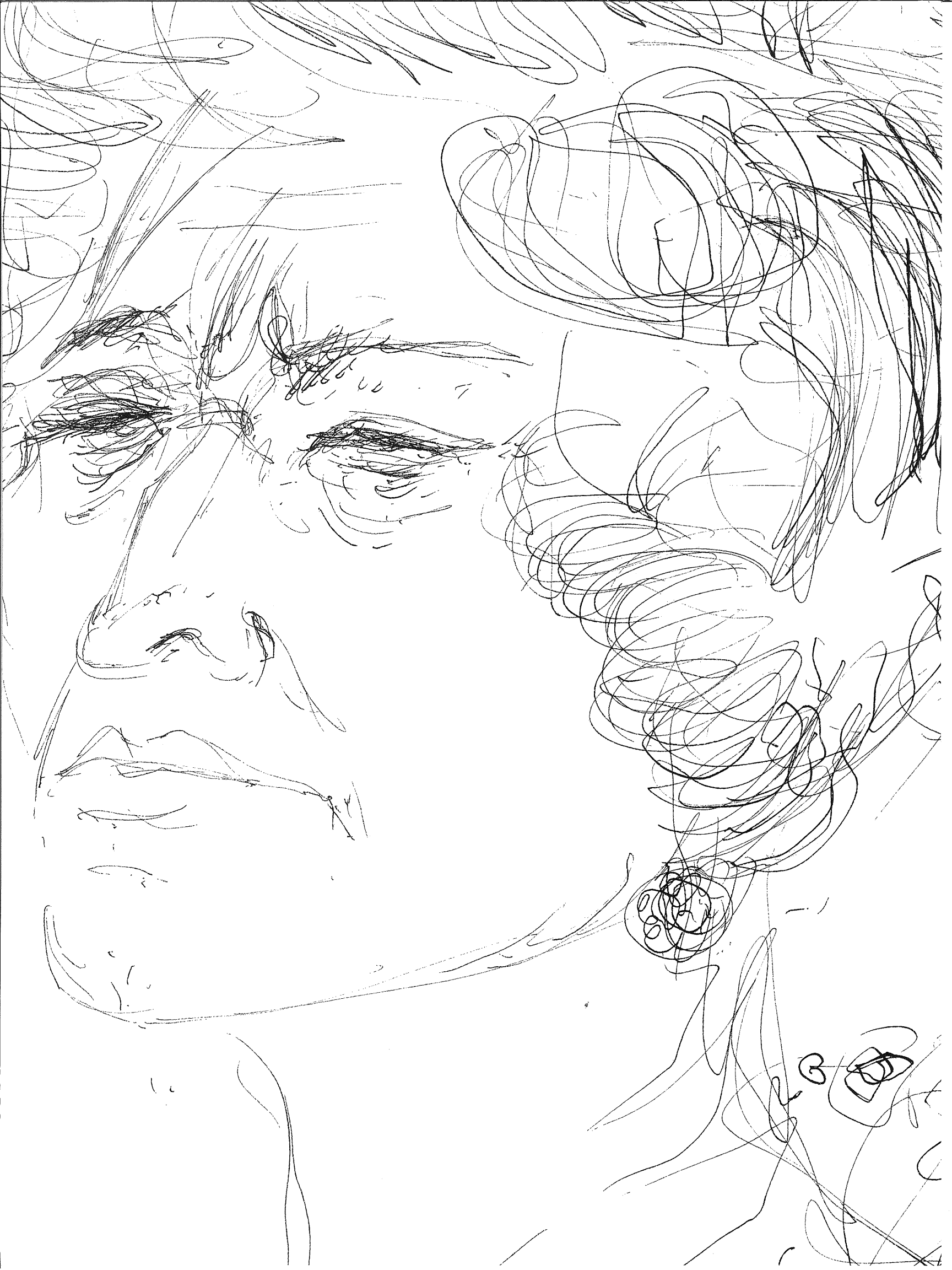








lots at Chioggia France IX '82





5 4 Great Britain. "All right," I said, "I'll sit on the balcony. I shall warn you when the house catches fire and then I'll jump off." And so my total horror of war —ridiculed by my family and friends, who were all sure that neither Hitler nor war would ever dare to touch Holland—chased me to Belgium, to Scotland, to Australia, to America. And I became against my inclinations a "cosmopolitan," but learned that emigration for the artist is just another word for exile.

For years I lived on the memory of my beloved: the fatherland of five square miles where I learned to see. Trees were real only there, and any tree with a resemblance of reality had to remind me of a tree I knew in that fatherland. A dirt road in Devonshire might suddenly become dear because it was like a dirt road of childhood, a beach in Australia remained alien because the texture of its sand was different from the Dutch beach of childhood. Was the infatuated vision of childhood influenced by art? I think so.

The painters who had interpreted the landscape were my idols. There were the ancestors (oil painting was invented in my region by Jan and Hubert van Eyck in the fifteenth century) as well as the living artists of my hometown: creatures, I felt, motivated by love, endowed with clairvoyance, men with a nobler life than that of the merchants and doctors my parents entertained.

So I remained faithful to my five-square-mile fatherland until on Long Island one day, while drawing an apple orchard, it spoke to me, as the apple orchards at home had done. Tossed about by the turbulent century, chased by the terror of war and violence, I had come home. The shells of the Long Island beaches restated the Dutch beaches of my childhood. That first intimation of the world's splendor had been recaptured.

Now I see the tossing about as more gain than loss. For the changes from Dutch Lowlands to Scottish Highlands, from native town to metropolis, made it



necessary for me as an artist to try to come to terms with the landscapes and environments I found myself tossed into, and to make my peace with them through drawing. It was the only way to make these strange places into a substitute home ground, to integrate them into my life experience. Nostalgia, however, had hidden something. After the revelation of the American orchard and the American beaches, this became clear: the five-square-mile fatherland still existed, but there was another fatherland, even smaller. Sometimes it was limited to only a few yards—perhaps the grasses that grew around my feet, or the sand and the shells around the spot where I happened to stop and lie down; while sometimes it stretched to the horizon.

The shells on Long Island, the trees of Maine, the pebbles of Oregon beaches showed me that, unbeknownst to myself, I was carrying my real homeland all the time within me, and that its landscape was unfolding itself wherever I stopped. On an airstrip in Equatorial Africa, where I was stranded a few days after an accident, the parched grass and the dry earth with ants crawling around my feet became—provisionally—home ground. Here, thousands of miles from my birthplace, the atmosphere was not familiar. It could be rendered only by very sharp seeing, by sensitive noting down. One cannot take a leaf of grass for granted.

When I first came to America, my drawings of Pittsburgh came to look like drawings of a European city. My nostalgia picked out the forms I knew: the cupolas of Victorian buildings, the steeples of pseudo-Gothic churches, the dilapidated workers' houses, which reminded me of industrial cities like Maastricht and Liège. But Pittsburgh is not Liège, and the drawings failed. Nostalgia and sentimentality are states of mind that destroy the exact visual concentration required: the total, devoted, yet detached attention, awareness, and respect for what is asking to be seen and drawn. This mental reservation, this interior looking backward is incompatible with the awareness drawing demands.

5 6 Now it seems the earth has become my home, wherever  
I stop, whether it is called Connecticut, Holland,  
France, or Ghana; or whether it is a Nigerian jungle  
path, in spite of ants, mosquitoes, and stinging flies; or  
a church piazza in Mexico, in sun-scorched loneliness.  
I was even able to make my peace with the jagged  
mountaintops of Ethiopia as my miserable plane  
skirted them precariously, making my peace so much  
that when my fountain pen suddenly clogged I  
continued drawing by using the pipette of my ink  
bottle as an instrument and the saliva that came  
abundantly to make the richest washes.

It might seem as if I had become enthusiastic about  
sightseeing as an incentive to drawing. It is not so. But  
if life happens to confront you with different locales,  
the visual challenge cannot be evaded, and you draw.  
The act of drawing establishes the relationship to





- 5 8 what is seen by accepting it as it is. And as in every relationship both components change: the landscape that at first may be frigid toward you will embrace you passionately later. In drawing, it is wooed. Then again the landscape that yielded dramatically at first may subsequently frighten you into impotence.

Sightseeing for its own sake deadens the desire; it is seldom that we can establish a relationship on the run. But sightseeing has by-products, which may surprise you, even though in itself it is a waste of time. The beauty spots of the world have been so totally

corrupted by publicity and color photography that communication with them has become practically impossible for the artist. At the pyramids, however, he may unexpectedly find a new world in the eye of a camel, just as I found at Niagara Falls that a wrinkled old Chinese eating his sandwich on a rock was vastly more fascinating than the immense masses of hurtling water. At Chartres Cathedral it was the fat baker's wife of the *patisserie* opposite whom I would have loved to draw in the nude.

We meet ourselves where least expected and cannot set the stage. I found my unexpected way to the heart of France by renting a dilapidated old car. Wherever it broke down and needed repairs, I discovered that it had found the best spot. Here the vineyards I would have sped past to reach Cannes revealed themselves in all their still glory, and here the morning mist lifted over silvery sandstone barns. Cocks crowed far and near, an ax sounded dully from nowhere, people whose faces are forever with me sauntered in their fields, and the gendarme sipped his Calvados for breakfast in the bistro on the corner.

At the Grand Canyon I was unmoved until I found a nest with three young birds: life-hungry eyes and beaks in expectation. In Versailles, behind a lavatory, night moths on a bush of weeds opened up the universe in all its fragility, eternity and splendor.

*Wherever they put me, it is all the same to me.*

GUSTAVE COURBET

AND SO, WHILE DRAWING, THE SUBLIME CONSTANTLY merges into the ludicrous. Sometimes drawing is laughing, and while the pen scratches on, I am all atingle with amusement.

V

From my window I draw the snow. Men are shoveling in slow motion. Then a woman comes along. Long pink legs traipse through the slush, topped by a mass of fur; inside she is utterly nude for all to see.

It happens again on a Sunday that all clothes suddenly become transparent. I look at the church emptying. People parade in their finery, and irritate me with their display of vanity. I take my pen and draw. As I draw, the clothing vanishes, I see bodies. My pen grinds and bumps with that young plump one, it limps old, exhausted with that grandmother, it carries itself with great bogus dignity, it cackles and gossips, it slaps its children, it makes eyes.

Then again while I am copying an El Greco self-portrait in the museum, people pass in front of me and become suddenly as fascinating as the painting I have come all the way to study. The pen jumps from El Greco's beard to the people who are discussing the portrait. "Do you think he is Jewish?" "He looks it," they are saying to each other.

I feel a grave amusement while drawing the women under my window—clicking past on high heels, carrying their pastries home, waddling away on worn shoes, dragging their children and vegetables, slinking home

60 from dates, darting off to rendezvous, dragging themselves to the doctors, shuffling to church, running to subways, stepping to the movies, rushing to the cleaners, the office, the market.

The pen delights in composing these groups spontaneously without plan or preparation. It is neutral and does not prefer women to men. It feels as happy where old men take public showers as it does among the beauty queens. It hardly chooses. It sets the value on all things, the price on none. It cannot lie like the soft pencil that can be erased or the charcoal that can be rubbed. Its yea is yea and its nay is nay, and when it says maybe, the hand that holds it had better stop for a while. The pen demands absolute attention, complete awareness.

It is my great friend and has gone to the ends of the earth with me but it never flatters me. It rejoices if it can make me feel really small and miserable. It can do no Schiele in my hand—no Picasso, no d'Honnecourt, no Rembrandt, no Seeghers. It does only one kind of trick for me, though I have in weak moments implored it to do a Steinberg, a Topolski, or just a tiny little Kokoschka. It won't, it would rather break. I could imagine such violent, unadjusted reactions if I had asked it to do a Buffet, which of course I wouldn't. I once asked it to make those interesting lines à la so-and-so, for a *Fortune* assignment, I believe. It went on strike for weeks. I have asked it to hide me once in a while like my mustache. My mustache does, but my pen gives me away, cruelly, without the compassion it showers on a dead herring. However, it does let me partake of all the beauty of the commonplace, it allows me to be aware of earth and flesh, season and latitude, of life and of death, of the one and the many and the uniqueness of each thing. It gives scope to my instinct and intuition yet does not reject my intellect. It reminds me I am alive *now*. When it is at work, both the beauties of yesterday and the comforts and horrors of tomorrow are relegated to where they belong: limbo. It protects me from going













6 4 mad, from doing the sensible things that are so much more insane than this senseless act of caressing forms with a thin line of ink. This love affair with a pen has some advantages. It allows me to travel light with all equipment in one pocket. On the other hand, it is a demanding lover. One day of neglect is punished with at least a week of frigidity. It is also a capricious lover. It considers any tree more exciting than a Picasso. It never gets sufficient devotion and resents any thought that interferes in our love-play. It does not allow me to change the smallest detail once it is drawn; it mercilessly shows up the slightest pretense. It makes me forget dealers and critics, because while working, the very word exhibition makes it stop dead. But then, why should a man's monologue or his dialogue with a pen command the attention of populations?

My drawing pen opened Europe and Africa to me. Basically they are not so different from America: trees and grasses grow, children play, grow up, and beget, the beaches are like home with the jewelry of flotsam and shells strewn over the crystals of the sands.

Yet there is a difference. In Catalonia the old black-clad gnarled bodies of peasant women are like human incarnations of olive trees. In Brittany, on the bald hills of Finistère, the white lace caps of the women still flutter wildly behind processional banners to miraculous shrines.

In Africa life is still like an opera, sung on different stages, by different actors, in different costumes. I saw the blue robes of the Yoruba women, symphonic poems in cobalt, cerulean, ultramarine, and indigo; the glaring white togas of the Haussas topped by orange or scarlet skullcaps; the veiled-white to near-sienna gowns of emaciated Ethiopians in a funeral procession; the magenta tulle stoles of the colossal women of Dakar; and the purple velvet headcloths of the women of Gambia, with orange-gold jewelry sparkling on taut mahogany skin.

It is a feast to draw these African women, waddling mountains of flesh, trembling with movement, laughter and anger, earth-mothers, awe- and love-inspiring, redoubtable in the conviction of their power as givers and sustainers of life, wailers and wakers over the dead.

After all this splendor it is harder to return to that modern world of housing developments and suburban tracts, more and more standardized and deodorized as industrialization engulfs the world. Those are the places one cannot draw. Their inhabitants are hard to distinguish from each other in their faceless equality. They feel their loss themselves and, fleeing the aridity of their environment, they travel on their holidays in uneasy family formation, plunking themselves down at some seaside resort as far from their habitat as the budget permits. Or they rush through as many countries as possible where, still unable to see, they snap a camera continuously.

What makes for this mad running around? What compels them to snap so obsessively? Are they seeking a place not yet spoiled by the others running around? Are they searching for a spot where they hope to feel as happy as once, on a never-forgotten walk in the rain when a child? Is there any hope really to see there, what is no longer seen here? Or have they given up hope ever to see again and do they just spot things and catch them in a little box to take home: the shadow of an unseen thing? Are they so addicted to machinery that they can feel reassured only with a machine between eye and object, even though it blots out all vision?

There are thousands of miles in America, in Europe, and in Africa, which I have "done" by car. Nothing has meaning in my memory except those places where I got out of the car to sleep or eat and where I wandered around for a short hour. Between New York and San Francisco all I remember are little patches of earth behind a motel in Pennsylvania, the spot where I had a flat tire in Ohio, the pond where I went swimming in Emporia, the roadside where I felt





France '58

4





8 4 neither plaster cast, nor mechanism of moving parts. It is a human being and the manner in which I render it gives me away completely. It is I, the artist, who in my nudes show myself naked for all to see. Every sloppiness, all incompetence, every fetishism, infantilism or callousness shows up in a man's drawing of the nude body. But also all that is good, profound and free becomes clear to whoever can read a drawing.

Rembrandt in his nudes shows his supreme understanding of, and compassion with, human destiny; Degas, his cold anger and irritation at the imperfections and stupidities of his models; Maillol, his pagan, human animality; Pascin, his nervous, melancholic sensuality; Bouguereau, his academic petrification; Félicien Rops, his sick eroticism; Ingres, his cold-hot tenderness; and countless thousands, their dirty little minds.

Why have painters since the Renaissance preferred the female nude? Is it because most painters until recently were males? It may be. For it is obvious that a man gazes with higher emotional charge on a woman's body than on a man's. I believe Picasso said that men should paint women and vice versa. Is it also because a woman expresses herself so much more easily through her body and exhibits herself so much more naturally, taking more delight in the attention bestowed on her? Or is it because male models are usually so clumsy, their repertory of poses so limited that they need a staff to lean on, a rope to hang against, or a hand to support a head pretending thought?

The importance of the model cannot be overstressed. Renoir in his old age never tired of caressing the female form, his brush tied to his stiff hand. "I need the model," he would say. "I ignite myself by this contact."

The contact is essential. There are good models and bad ones; and it is not sufficient for a girl to take off her clothes to become a model. A bad model gives me the feeling that I cannot draw any more.







In writing there are obvious criteria: words have to be organized into sentences and sentences have to convey some meaning. There has to be some control. Is this too hard? Then let's paint.

The man who sets out to make a chair has to work accurately, for a chair that wobbles, a chair one cannot sit on without its falling apart, shows him up as a pretentious incompetent . . . unless he calls it sculpture and becomes "creative." Who would dream of writing symphonies without knowing notes or give piano recitals without ever having played scales?

The pen, even more than charcoal, refuses to flatter one's vanity. It demands a steady hand, coordinated with a clear eye. Without pity it shows up all flabbiness of purpose, the slightest flagging of concentration. The pen is not only mightier than the sword, it is even mightier than the brush. The pen is even mighty enough—for who dares answer its challenge?—to cure the paranoia (delusions of grandeur and persecution) so easily unleashed by brush-wielding. (Needless to say, few people afflicted with paranoia have a desire to be cured, and there is little inducement, for, as is well known, every paranoiac has his "paranees," who just can't wait to confirm his delusions of grandeur and even feed them. These "paranees" may bring fame to the patient if he is an artist, or a following of *Sturmtruppen* if he is a politician.)

To learn to draw—a study that takes a lifetime—one has to draw everything and especially the nude body. Drawing the nude is my daily or at least weekly prayer. After I have thus prayed, my mind is at ease and I can work on. In drawing, beginner's luck definitely does not exist, for it is exceedingly difficult. It is a constant test of skill and will and concentration. It is more than an academic task. For the nude model is

- 8 o completely forgotten until much later the longing returned. Perhaps they were suddenly moved by last sunrises on poplar trees, by lifting mists at dawn.

After all, why shouldn't they try? How many times did they not feel, looking at contemporary painters: even I could do better than that? Maybe they could, but the new-type Sunday painter has a terrible handicap. He has become a market for whole industries: the artist-material industry, the frame makers, the mail-order art courses extract his money and flatter his vanity.

After covering a number of prefabricated canvases with blobs and strokes which at first fill him with joy, he soon feels he is stuck, that something is missing. "Just take our simple, infallible course," the advertising columns say. Only then the new Sunday painter is quite lost, for he starts to "develop." Under the misguidance of ready-made criticism, the jargon of the art courses, the returned impulse of the artist-child is quickly perverted. With local exhibitions and prizes, a new competitiveness enters his life, choking the original longing to a second and final frustration and death.

One cannot dispense with drawing without missing the very wellspring of art, one cannot attain freedom of expression without drawing oneself to freedom. All shortcuts mean the acquisition of a small bag full of tricks on which to depend: heads à la Klee, hands à la Picasso, monstrosities à la Bacon, drips à la Pollock. Dead-end alleys.

But if I draw, aims will clarify themselves. While drawing, I have a chance to discover my own handwriting and through it my authenticity. To find this unique authenticity is not only the point of practicing an art, it is the point of being alive at all. It is only because of the breakdown of criteria in the visual arts (who has not wondered how exactly juries arrive at their choice of prizes in large group shows?) that the sloppiest products of our time are offered to

*Not that they starve, but starve so dreamlessly.*

VACHEL LINDSAY

THE OLD-TIME SUNDAY PAINTER, NOW COLLECTED SO furiously, who lovingly enumerated all the leaves of the oak tree and all the bricks of the church tower, was an endearing species not yet encouraged by the advertisements. No ideas of esthetics and "development" were drummed into his head. He did not read the art magazines or visit museums of modern art.

## VII

I knew such a Sunday painter when I was a child. He was a clerk in my father's business. He had no illusion of being an artist. I can still see the faithful drawings of our city gates done by Fons, with every stone imitated as if his life depended on precise imitation.

"I just copy," he would apologize, "but real artists make things sing." And then he pointed out passages in the post-Impressionist local painters he adored like idols. But Fons was too true to his eye to imitate those painters instead of following his own perception, and so he was perhaps the most real artist I knew in my childhood. His eye was in love, and he worked from that infatuation. He drew until he died, a salesman—and an innocent. I surmise that it is to Fons I am indebted for taking art as a serious matter and for my faith in the vision of my own eyes.

The new-type Sunday painter may start with the purest impulse. He may have been one of those many children in whom the artist was awakened only to be submerged by the onslaught of later life. I have met many people in whom the dream persisted in a different form. They became gallery addicts, collectors, critics or art-haters. In others, however, the artist was







7 6 "Tenderness is not weakness," Chardin's still lifes prove.  
"Nor is freedom nihilism," add the Rembrandt  
drawings.

The Rubens sketches teach that spontaneity is by no  
means sloppiness. Goya demonstrates the gulf that  
separates passion from convulsive loss of control.  
Uccello proclaims that strength is not brutality. Ingres  
shows that chastity and frigidity are not synonymous.  
Guardi proves that vitality is not violence and Fra  
Angelico that joy and mania are not at the same but at  
opposite poles.

And the Chinese speak in gigantic whispers and from  
their still serenity universes spring forever.

I take out my sketchbook and draw. Not to copy or to  
learn the secrets that are theirs, but to converse with  
their spirits.

What advertised itself a few blocks away as sheer passion and spontaneity—what was it in reality? Are we mistaking once more the wheezing of asthma for sighs of passion?

7 5

Since childhood I have made friends in the museums. When I was fourteen I loved Memling and spent hours looking at his madonnas in Bruges; he initiated me into my first and all-too-persistent ideals of female beauty. The Rembrandts at the Rijksmuseum opened up the depths of the human face; Vermeer, the falling of embracing light over objects; Chardin, the preciousness of bread and wine. Boudin taught me to see the diaphanous vapors of the harbors, and his vision is so valid that I can never approach the coast of France without thinking of him. The Van Gogh of the Arles landscapes and of the drawbridge strangely enough unlocked visions of Dutch landscape stripped of Dutch conventions. Vlaminck made me conscious of the heaviness of the lowland atmosphere of which I was part; Morandi, the absolute dignity of a few bottles. Totally disenchanted with the follies of our society, I have become reconciled because there was a Monet among men who loved a poppy field and painted it according to his own, painfully discovered truth.

I could go on making a catalogue of these ever-giving friends, made famous or left obscure by enigmatic destiny, but why? What matters is that each one was a seer who offered me his illumination, transfigured an everyday aspect of my world, lifted a veil of blindness and made me see.

In the museums I can listen to these visionaries of the commonplace . . . of what the blind call commonplace, for these men saw only miracles. To these friends I have access on any day, to those few who became men before they died and thus have justified the creation and existence of our monstrous breed. In intimacy I can question those who fulfilled their potentialities, and I receive their answers:













*Certain forms of art and of thought demand, in order to be admired, that one has reached the highest degree of deformation, the more unconscious and uncontrollable as it is collective.*

MARCEL JOUHANDEAU

## VI

SOMETIMES WHEN IT IS RAINING, HAILING, OR SNOWING, when the studio is unheatable, sometimes when I am low in spirit, when the international boiling point is once again practically reached, when all efforts seem utterly futile, I go to the museums, the Frick or the Metropolitan.

But first, as I walk up Madison Avenue, I stop in a few galleries. They are empty on these cold days, empty and hot. They are quiet but for the noise the walls are making. The ladies of the galleries hand me catalogues filled with cryptic titles. "Isn't this an exciting show!" they exclaim, taking me for a prospective buyer because of my clean shoes. But I did not come to be excited, I came to be nourished, to be delighted, to be touched, to meet something human, something warm, to experience compassion or wit, true despair or true hope. Rarely I find it and so I go on to the museums.

Here it is quiet, but the silence is charged. The brooding, absolutely *unexciting* Egyptian sculptures stare over my mortal head into eternity, the empty eyes of Romanesque kings pierce me, the tender inwardness of Burgundian madonnas are a kiss of purest dew.

After the gigantic paint slabs of Madison Avenue a tiny Vermeer looms enormous, vibrating with the filtered light of the Dutch afternoon it captured three centuries ago. A Chardin still breathes the short life of a few plums. A small El Greco contains a universe in violent motion, stilled in contemplation and clairvoyance. The woman Goya caressed still has eyes shining with devilry and her flesh has never aged.

sick in the San Joaquin Valley. All the rest, all the "splendors" seen from the car, all those panoramas, lakes, and mountains have faded like cheap picture postcards.

I cannot take a car and *see* a country. The machine interposes itself. What is a country that rushes past, a country I cannot hear, a country I cannot smell or taste or feel?

There are lost souls who are too hurried or too lazy to walk, who have to swallow continents in a week: four capitals, six cathedrals, ten museums, a forum, and a bull ring. How can they ever relish the dew on the rocks? Lost also are the souls who swallow a "cuisine" at each meal: "We'll have caviar, lobster thermidor, *escargots*, champagne, pressed duck, and *crêpes suzette*." How can they taste the ecstasy of good butter on fresh bread?





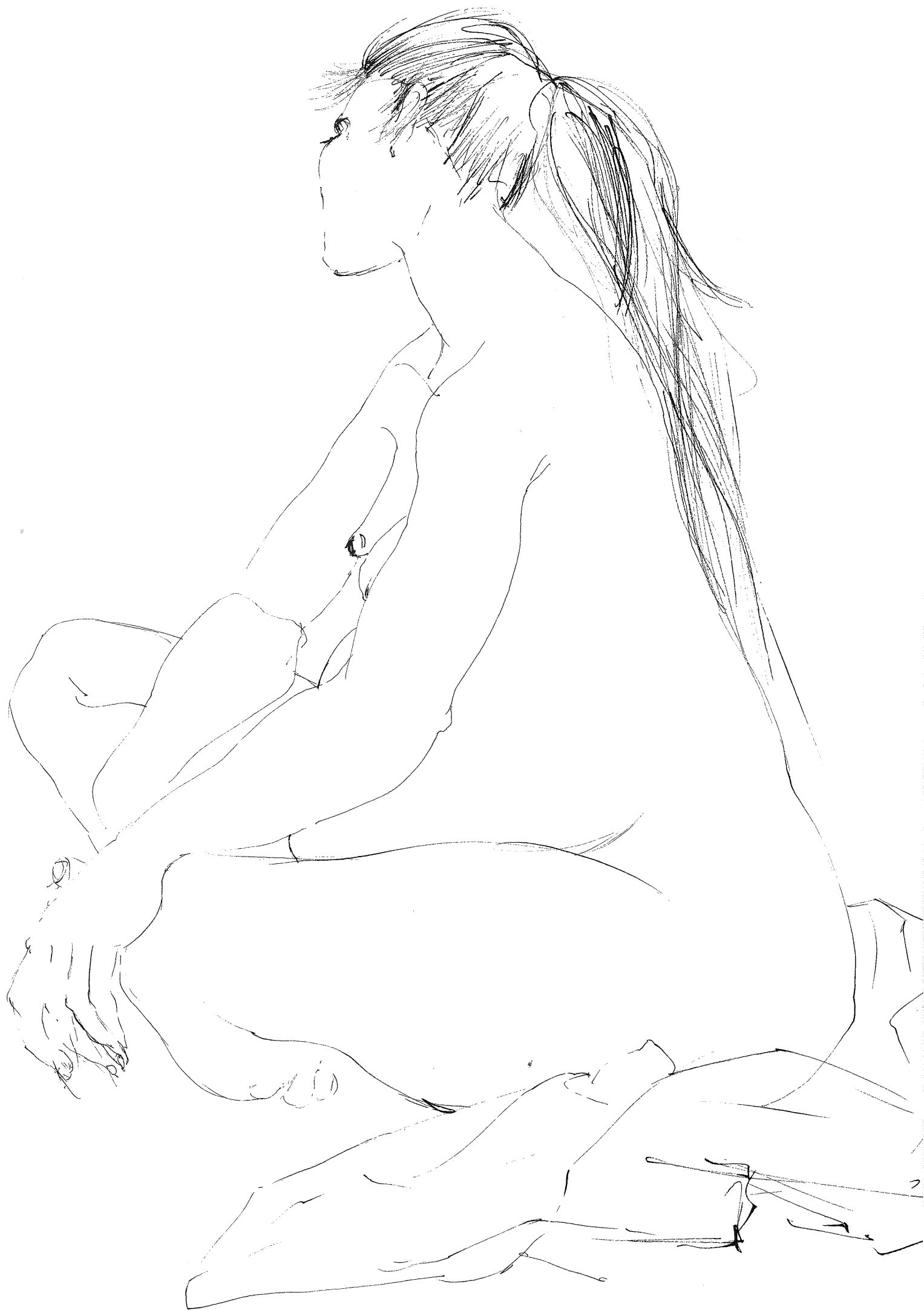




8 8 A good model practically draws herself. Elemental women, incarnations of the forces of nature, seem to make better models than intellectualized ones. Plump ones are usually preferable to modish stalks.

The good model draws herself indeed, her every gesture flows, all is natural, spontaneous, nothing is put on. She is neither afraid of being ridiculous nor of being immodest. She does not give it a thought. Whether she is "beautiful" or "ugly" is immaterial. It is the movement of her body, the expression of her face, that intangible something that makes the pen move by itself. Whether she is a woman in bloom, or a woman worn out by childbearing, or a smooth little virgin, it is her inner life that informs her every movement of hand, head and pelvis.

My favorite model is at least fifty-five. She is no beauty and she talks constantly. When I first saw her in her shabby clothes, looking like a dilapidated charwoman, I resigned myself to a lost evening. When she was nude I saw at once that this old body had once been trained for the ballet, and that life had destroyed its smoothness but not its grace. A grace made heavy and poignant by the passing of the years, the children born, the floors scrubbed, the illnesses overcome. "Why do you draw that old bag?" men will say, thumbing through a heap of drawings. "She is horrible," say the girls, each pushing to the back of her mind the realization that in a few years she will be much like old Loulou, though without her elegance of movement. Such a model you draw with the love and the respect with which you draw a tree.





- 9 0 That is, if the spirit moves you. In some sessions you think you draw well from the beginning, and when the next day you look at the drawings, you see that the whole batch should be thrown into the stove. In other sessions you go through hours of despair, then find you have done well. It is wise to forget the distress caused by the bad drawings, it is even wiser not to adore the good ones for more than an hour. They might seduce to mannerism and stagnation.

I rarely paint nudes. Yet I cannot forego drawing from life. In the aridity of the city the nude model is my landscape of flesh. She is the archetypal mother, the nymph, the imp. She is chaste or perverse, athletic or languid, bovine or spirited. She always demands worship in work. In the city she is my epitome of nature. The continuous test of my skill. The constant, pitiless measure of my growth, stagnation, maturity or decline.

*Do not go gentle into that good night,  
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.*

DYLAN THOMAS

IT WAS THROUGH A COINCIDENCE THAT I STARTED TO draw on Welfare Island. This self-contained world is located in the middle of New York's East River, some fifteen block lengths from Times Square. To a large degree it is still the dump, where the callous city deposits its oldsters, its most decrepit bums, its indigent invalids and chronically ill. It is not as bad as it used to be, and the old people in Bird S. Coler hospital live in clean wards. Valiant efforts are even being made to interest them in their environment, to have them form—so shortly before the final chord—a new community. But usually they just sit in the day rooms, staring in front of them, reliving fragments of their lives, paying no attention to the TV with its soap opera or its exhortations to use some brand of cream for a radiant complexion or to coax these poor abandoned old women to “surprise your husband with mmmm . . . MIXO. . . . tonight.”

While I drew them, totally worn-out women mumbled through toothless mouths their stories about fathers and mothers in Minnesota, Italy, or Ireland, as if reliving incarnations of eons ago. A dying man whispered from his pillows: “You know, they forget that we are old people who have not always been old. Once we were young, and for most of our lives we have been adults. They should not treat us like silly children. I don't want ever to be herded into a movie again.”

An aristocratic man in a hospital shirt had watched me benevolently and quietly and had posed for me by silent agreement. He spoke about Cesar Franck, Widor and Bach. “I have found myself,” he said. “I

## VIII



france



9 4 used to be an organist. No, since some time I do not miss my organ very much any more. I discovered something. I discovered that we are born as spiritual beings, and then for a long time we forget."

"Isn't it depressing," my friends worried, "to sit and draw there day after day?" I never found it so. To sit there yes, to draw there no! I often plan to return to Welfare Island. It constitutes a necessary corrective to the standards of Madison Avenue seven blocks away.

The lined faces, the hands with their parchment skin, brought back to me again a great awareness of our contemporaneity. It did not frighten me, this reminder of transiency, this *memento mori*, this realization that my models here were scheduled for departure perhaps a little earlier than I.

I was reminded also of that strange experience when at last the longed-for exhibition in my hometown came about, after so many years in America. I went to Maastricht for it. I had no idea why I had wanted it so much. The quiet city had grown much in the years of my absence and had been modernized. The people at my opening were as unknown to me as I was to them. Nearly all the friends of my youth had moved away, or they were middle-aged family men interested only in their families, their jobs, and their cars. The grown-ups of my youth, the people whose approval or admiration I must have sought without knowing it, were mostly dead. Here and there was a fragile octogenarian who came to shake hands with me, and he invariably mistook me for my brother or even my father. Here I got my lesson in transiency.

On Welfare Island I was greatly stirred to experience that all living protoplasm moves even in its senility, moves at each second until the very moment of final immobility in death.





W. J. P. 1960





9 8 It was certainly not more depressing to draw these old and sick people than to draw a glamorous, still youthful woman and during the drawing to become conscious that one is noting down nothing but signs of emptiness and impending decay. It was not sadder than drawing shells at the beach, shells testifying to millions of years of the living and dying of all organisms, all composite structures, not more heart-rending than sketching a fallen gull.

I just tried to draw as truly as possible on the Island, knowing I could not possibly succeed in noting down the thousands of years of human experience—of striving and feeling. Could the lines and dots I made give a living image, could they convey my identification and my compassion? This self-doubt was the only depression and despair.

The old people, content to mumble constantly about their children in Kansas, the fine farm they had in Iowa, their youths in Sicily or the Ukraine, allowed me to draw in peace. The TV babbled through it all about something “harmless to the most delicate undies.” I was drawing an ancient Italian who had been a barber all his life.

“If you have the intelligence,” he said, “you canna becommma barber inna three months. Now, why you must be apprentice for sikse years? Because you must becommma barber in the spirit! I laugh! I laugh! Boys becommma dottore in four or sikse years. How long it takes to becommma dottore in spirit? Scusi!”

“And how long to become an artist?” I ask myself.



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*The eye with which I see God  
Is the same with which God sees me.*

MEISTER ECKHART

SOMETIMES I FEEL TIRED OF DRAWING PEOPLE, THEIR twitching faces, their restless eyes, the clutching muscles of hands and all the signs of compulsion or pleasure or status. Then even the animals in their constant motion, the insects in their whirring, even the landscapes in their expanse do not really touch me. Then I know full well that I strayed from that essential ingredient of drawing, which is visual contemplation. I must descend into myself to recover my capacity to see.

Here I can recall my very earliest experience of overwhelming beauty and poignancy. I was perhaps five years old and my mother and my aunt had taken their children to a tea garden with seesaws and swings at the outskirts of our small Dutch town. A trio was playing on the shaky bandstand: a most impressive thin-faced violinist with a pince-nez; a rotund, bald pianist with a shiny bulbous nose and an ascot; and a lady cellist, full-bosomed in her white organdy blouse, her instrument clamped between short fat thighs. I escaped across the little stream bordering the playground and found myself in a meadow, where I lay down, burying my head in the grass. I saw a bee that frightened and delighted me; it zoomed and buzzed and alighted on a large dandelion and started to suck. Suddenly I saw the sunlight, the dandelion, a velvety purple flower, the grasses and the bee as if I were one of them. Yet each of these things stood out quite clearly, as if utterly alone and by itself. It was as if I were seeing things three-dimensionally through my grandfather's stereopticon. The world had opened magically and taken me in. I disappeared in it. An indescribable joy took hold of me. I had come as close to reality as I was ever to come in all my life.

I X



Randy  
March 8/53  
Epilobium c. hirsutum







It may be because of this experience that, when I feel myself drowning in trivialities, in the futility of rushing and scheming, worrying and planning, I am drawn so irresistibly toward weeds and grasses. Suddenly on a roadside or in a city lot I see them again and have to draw them. The seeing itself is the beginning of recovery. I find again the key to what matters. And perhaps even the revelation of the meadow and that stereoscopic vision. I O 3

But on this one cannot count, for revelations come when they will and are to be neither coaxed nor bribed. When I seek them in loneliness, they evade me, but they may visit me unbidden in the hum of the most dreadful cocktail party.

Drawing is a cure for the dulling process of living in our society, an antidote against the stupor brought about by the constant bombardment of horror and nonsense.

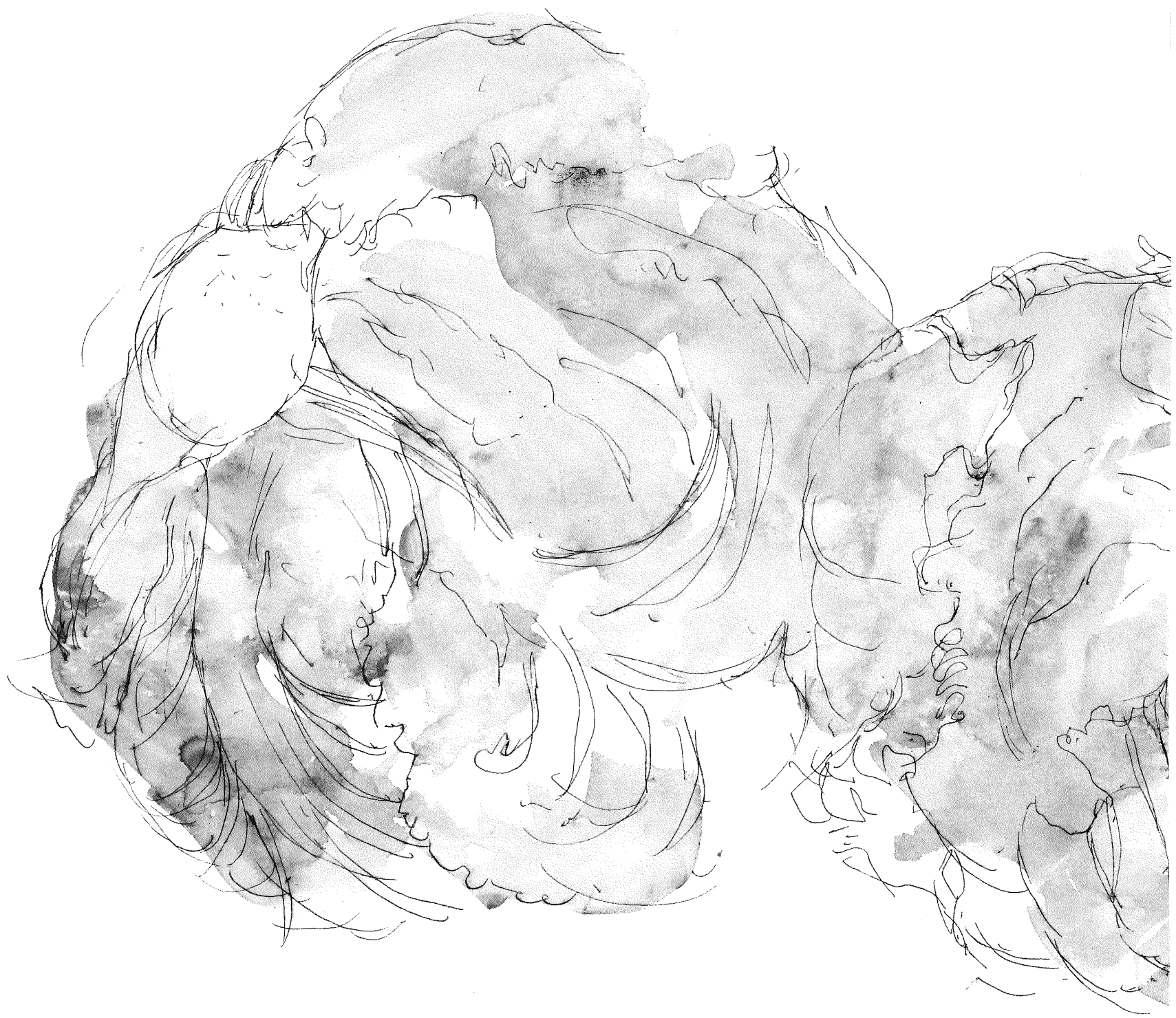
I find myself oppressed by the eight o'clock news. A newer, more terrible weapon has been dreamed up, the President's wife has a new hairdo, there is a famine in China, the film goddess is divorcing her seventh mate, some voice talks about "miracles of the future." Are they all running, flying, striving, slaving, buying, murdering, conquering in order to reach the supreme aim of feeling alive?

I start to draw and the nightmare dwindles. The dandelion has indescribable leaves. What looked like pebbles are minuscule conch shells, silvery gray, dove brown, speckled charcoal. The face I thought I knew so well I had apparently never seen: how that skin sags around her eyes, how bitter the left angle of her mouth. What color is mussel blue?

I have escaped. From reality? No, into reality. From the madhouse into sanity. I could not have done anything anyway about the famine in China or the First Lady's hairdo or the "miracles of the future."









I am doing something about the mussel shell and find it blue. I have escaped from the newspapers with their vicarious experience, from the substitute thoughts of the reviewers and commentators, from the portable prison of my delusions, into the security of my own reality which is my knowledge of being alive. What impresses me as the greatest miracle of all is that of mere existence, my own and that of the subject of my senses.

107

To be an artist consists perhaps in this capacity for awareness of and delight at being thoroughly alive within oneself. The artist's most important function is the transmission of this awareness. The act of carving, composing or drawing is like the singing of a song of praise to life. The perishable by-product on paper, canvas or stone—washed away by time like a child's drawing in the sand—may transmit this wonder and celebration to a few who are attuned to it.

I think of the gentle Boudin now, putting down his delight in skies and beaches on modest canvases with incomparable blues and grays. He has survived triumphantly so much grandiose claptrap. He would say of a cloud, "One should caress it as if it were a woman's shoulder." And about his art, "I am just a little lark, I sing my simple songs to the gray clouds."

While drawing weeds, I sometimes still hear the remembered sentimental melody of the tea garden's trio, but more often I hear the triumphant resignation of Brahms's German Requiem, "And all the flesh is like the grass. . . ."

And for a while I am at peace.



*Raise the stone, and thou shalt find me; cleave the wood,  
and there am I....* FROM "THE LOGIA"

X

EVERY TREE IS AN INDIVIDUAL, EVERY ROCK HAS A personality. It takes as much identification to draw a tree as it does to draw a nude.

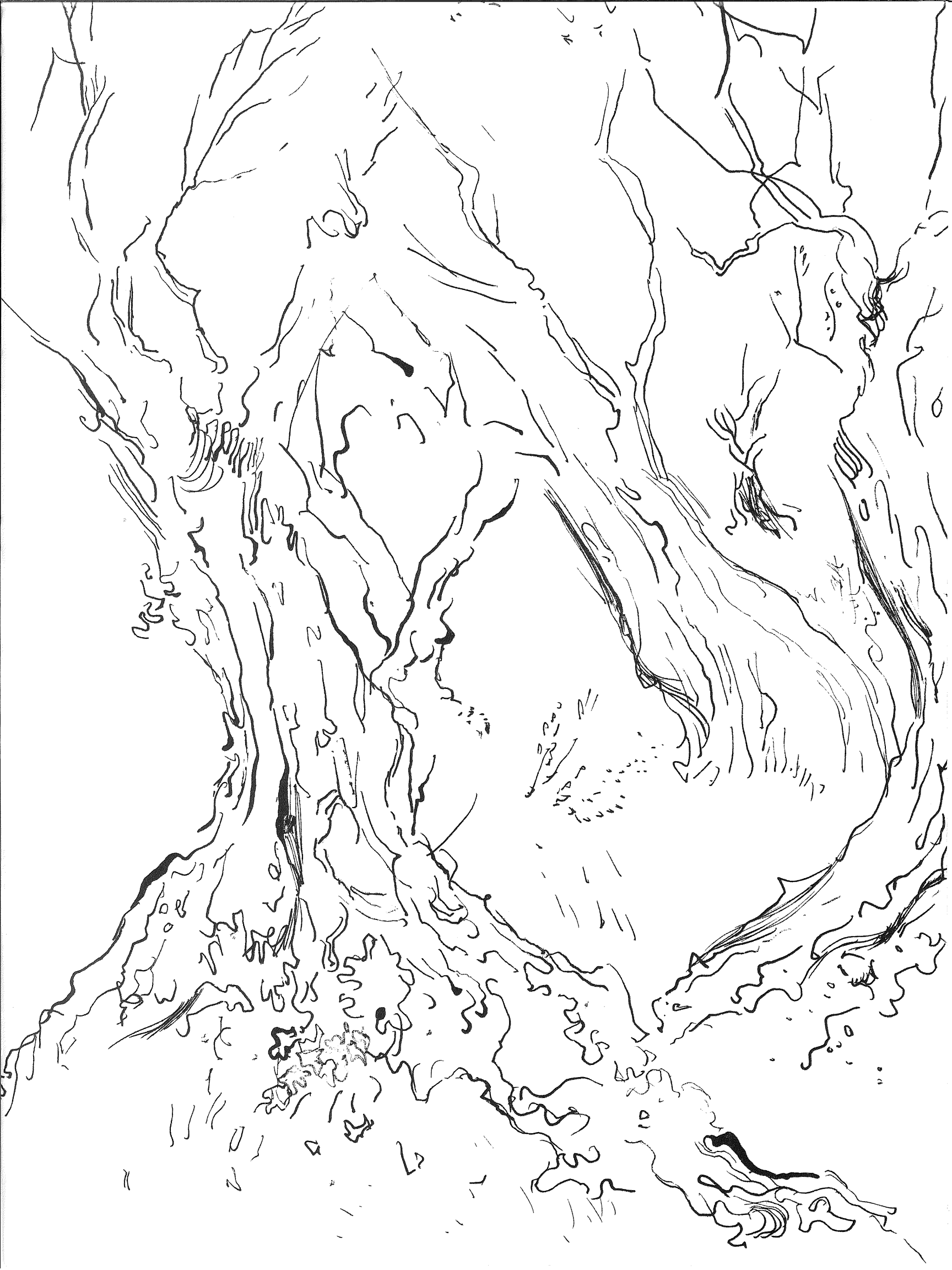
Driving through the redwoods of California I see "timber," until I stop and sit down in front of one tree and start drawing it, with or without pen or paper. It is the mind that draws, and perhaps the fingertips that involuntarily follow the living, straight stem as it emerges from its own roots.

This came as a revelation: while I was drawing, one of those utterly simple ordinary things like a clump of trees, it revealed itself to be composed of individuals, each one growing from its own roots. Roots that came from a seed in which some enigmatic wisdom had been stored, directing its growth. A tree logos. A tree potentiality become flesh.

Looking on with eyes and hands, following the course of growth from roots to top, I relive the nearly imperceptible torsion of the trunk as it bores itself into space, obeying and resisting mysterious forces in its struggle to unfold its potentiality, to fulfill its destiny. I notice the wounds of its childhood, healed into scars but visible until death, the capriciousness of burls and tumors along its life course, the sprouting of shoots from its ancient feet.

I became aware of the tree as a being, not a thing. The being of the tree is a process as I am a process. For a little while its process and my own run parallel, as I identify with it while drawing.







Near Menton there is an old olive grove. It is so old that its trees no longer bear fruit. They have the terrible strength some women have after they have done with the business of charming, marrying, and childbearing; they have the invulnerable beauty that becomes theirs after the mating-mask nature had lent to them has withered away.

I I I

In that grove I have drawn for days. Each one of these olive trees shows that through its many years it has struggled with all the forces of wind and lightning and rain, all the angels and devils of the tree world. Each tree has lost a few limbs in the struggle but has survived. Its roots have grasped the earth as tentacles, as claws, as legs, as feet; its branches and its trunk read like a compendium of all the forms of nature. The grove at Menton would be my favorite place of exile. Within its square mile it would offer me the human and animal body in all its unending variations; there is not one form of foot, or breast, or buttock these olives do not have. There is not a mountain, a cloud, a hillock, or a sea monster whose form cannot be discerned in the roots, trunks, and branches of these venerable trees.

Where there are no nudes to draw, I draw trees. The limbs of apple trees move as if crushing weights block their every movement toward sky and light. The tree's every contortion is testimony to giving in to, yet circumventing, the oppressive forces in order to overcome them triumphantly. Suddenly the young shoots burst cheering toward the sun, straight as the sun's rays, answering them, meeting them, and sucking them into themselves.

Apple trees are universes: a nude one in winter, a blushing one in bloom, or one bearing fruit in that dazzling, confusing richness of branches and leaves, which the mind cannot encompass nor the hand adequately follow.

I I 2 Mondrian's apple trees of 1911 are an effort to come to grips with an apple tree. This was his last great struggle. I feel what followed was an abdication, however pioneering, revolutionary, and perhaps even sage. The error was, is, and will be that one cannot come to grips with an apple tree merely in plastic terms. Its essence has more dimensions. It is the tree of life—as is every other tree—only a little more so. It is not a two-dimensionality that has to be projected onto paper or canvas. In olive trees and apple trees it is not three dimensions either that suffice, for they demonstrate four. Whosoever has just once really *seen* such a tree—not merely recognized and labeled it—has seen not only space but time. Following the tree from its roots, the eye traces through time, following not a thing, but an unfolding process. This is what the eye perceives.

It is a platitude that life is short, mine or a tree's. I find my own life has lasted an eternity. I am so old that I remember many early happenings as though they had happened not to me but to a person I hardly know. I am so young that I love to steal grapes along the road.

In this one life, then, I have been reincarnated many times, and the continuity of my ego is a most tenuous thread. Even though this life must end, I feel it has had ample chance to taste the eternity in which we are bathed and of which we are the product. This is what I see in each tree when for a moment I am sufficiently awake to see.

Rembrandt, who in the art of the West knew as much as any painter about reality (and, as I believe, through his passion for and understanding of the process of drawing) knew this about trees. His trees are archetypal. Mondrian's never penetrate beyond the mechanism; Fragonard's are stage decorations; Vlaminck's and Derain's are devised conceits; Segonzac's grow in his drawings, but coagulate in his paintings; while those of painters as different as Blakelock and Cezanne one



Panel VIII  
Moonlight in the  
bamboo forest











remembers as valid. Also the trees of old Theodore Rousseau, nearly forgotten painter of Barbizon, who in his last days said: "For God, and as a reward for the life He has given us, let the manifestation of life in our work be our first concern; let us make man breathe and allow a tree really to grow. He who knows how to make live is a god."

I I 7

The drawing of trees, too, makes us grasp the reply of the Japanese sage Joshu to the monk, who asked him "Who is the Buddha?" Joshu answers: "The cypress tree in the courtyard."

While I am drawing nature, there is nothing left in me of that notorious alienated man of our time and his loneliness. Could it be that, while drawing, I am released out of time into the ever present? That, as I draw, I participate in the very life of nature, whether in the form of a tree, a stone, or a human face?

If I just stop my car a few miles away from the city instead of speeding on like a robot, if I can conquer my inertia and walk for an hour, the earth, the water, the air and the fire, my own elements, will sustain me again: flesh of my flesh, blood of my blood, primary images of my waking life and my dreams. The rhythm of surf is mirrored in my own pulsing bloodstream. The soft rolling hills are like frozen images of a quiet sea. The jagging heights of rocks and mountains are a petrified ocean tempest. Every plant is pushing through the skin of the earth as hairs push through my own skin.

Even the abominable nightmare of the bomb we created I can put to use. It compels me to regard this whole earth at every moment with tenderness, compassion and delight. It is as vulnerable as I.

Thus I turned to the humblest things in nature and found delight in them. I started to draw and paint rocks and stones, pebbles, shells and flotsam, these perennial elements of nature. The old Chinese called rocks the

I I 8 "bone structure of the earth." When we die, our substance will be transformed rapidly into plants and trees; it will take millions of years before it becomes rock. So rock, too, is a depository of life, and the Orientals, condemning any painting of rocks that lacked *ch'i* (vital force) knew this.

In the art of the West these cliffs and rocks have been neglected, except as details in landscapes and figure pieces. The fanciful rocks of Patinir have little vitality and are often but inverted clouds. Brueghel in his drawings made them live, but as backdrop for human events. Only Hercules Seeghers created rocks and cliffs of haunting force and organic complexity, and these to me are more poignant even than those of the great Chinese, to whom, too, all in nature was alive and related.

In the West, rocks are there to be climbed or to be blasted, pebbles to be used for gravel. But children have always delighted in them, searching for treasures along the beaches, stuffing their pockets with agate and jasper, flint and quartz, in endless perfections of shapes. I must confess I have joined them, suddenly recapturing that gift of the child: the capacity of reacting to all things and of finding a new life in them.

*They have a lease of nature, and it is not yet out.*

HENRY DAVID THOREAU

ACTUALLY, I CAN'T DRAW ANIMALS AT ALL. I HAVE NOT studied them stuffed in museums of natural history. I have not, like the sculptor Barye, measured their bones in museums or studied the musculature of skinned lions, as he did together with Delacroix at the Jardin des Plantes. I know little or nothing about animal anatomy, although I still remember vividly the revulsion I felt, very long ago, when I let myself be forced to dissect dogs, and cats, and frogs, as a medical student.

## XI

But in Africa I couldn't withstand the challenge of drawing the young gorilla they had next door or Dr. Schweitzer's nasty chimpanzee, who tried to trip me up each time I passed him.

While I was drawing antelopes they would snuggle up to me to lick my salty neck; attracted by my drawing, they would start nibbling the paper. A marvelous caged eagle turned his profile to me, and I met his eye each time I looked up. At last what looked out of his eye and what looked out of mine met at middle distance and melted into one. A sick pelican's eyes met mine, and I had to draw the suffering bird.

There is nothing sentimental about the act of drawing. It presupposes total acceptance. Disgust, pity and fear are eliminated, not because of any magic, but because the object-subject duality is suspended.

I was awakened from a reverie one hot afternoon by the hysteria caused when a huge snake was sighted on a hospital roof. There were pelicans on the beaches;





Frank  
58

116 B. 11. 11. 11.



Tanek 7.59





1 2 4 captured hyenas appeared from nowhere; huge owls and sea eagles were caught by children; an elephant baby was tied to a tree at a lumbering camp; a mandrill was tethered in view of a garden party, to which he presented his magenta buttocks. From cars I have drawn giraffes sticking out of underbrush, a clan of baboons fleeing back into the bush, a lioness suckling its young.

I did not have to study the anatomy of animals. Often I did not know how the animal was properly called, let alone the number of its vertebrae. Entering into the animal's spirit, I drew.



*Roosters in Kenya*  
1/19/17



Francis







Frank 7.54









Francis VIII 61



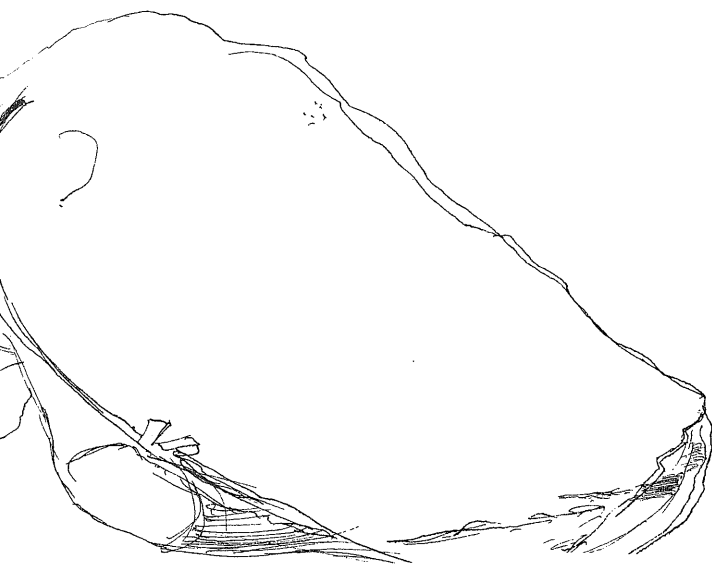
*There was a fisherman in China who was using a straight needle to fish with for forty years. When someone asked him, "Why don't you use a bent hook?" he replied, "You can catch ordinary fish with a bent hook, but I will catch a great fish with my straight needle." Word of this came to the ear of the Emperor, and he came to see this fool of a fisherman for himself. The Emperor asked the fisherman, "What are you fishing for?" The fisherman replied, "I was fishing for you, Emperor."* MAHAYANA BUDDHIST STORY

## XII

RETURNED TO AMERICA, I DREW GULLS ON THE BEACHES, especially the dead ones, often dragged down by tar and oil and lying still as if just plummeted to earth in midflight, or starfish and crabs torn asunder by tides on rocks.

The beaches are matrices of life and unending cemeteries of trillions of beings; they are reservations of life and death; they are unconquerable by the pollution of cities or the desecration of cabana clubs and massive parking lots. Here the spirit still blows where it will, and the elements can still be felt to be the great adversary of man. It is amazing that raw nature is still reachable by subway on winter days on Rockaway or Brooklyn beaches, where sandpipers, gulls and loons take over. On those days the sands at Jones Beach are deserted, and in patches of sand between the snow and the water lie the millions of clam shells, uncrushed, in an infinity of shape and color and size. Sharks and skates are washed ashore, their horror mouths open. Portuguese men-of-war glisten purplish like enormous amethysts, small silver smelts stare at the icy sky in a gesture of ultimate terror; horseshoe crabs, these prehistoric monstrosities, as if invented by Hieronymus Bosch, lie shattered, their battered shields among the seaweeds.

These beaches taught me what the cities and the long travels, the museums and the art magazines could not teach me. Here, on the interminable stretches of sand, shells and debris, I discovered the invulnerable landscape for our time. Even the jet planes screeching over it every other minute no longer disturb the gulls and







sandpipers; the highways bordering it with the unbroken  
rush of cars do not affect the stillness, punctuated only  
by incoming tides. I 3 5

All the rest of landscape is disappearing. As we  
“develop” it, it shrinks year after year until it will have  
vanished. Housing developments spawn in the open  
spaces between our cities and choke them. Where last  
year cows grazed, there is now a shopping center of  
chain stores. The landscape is viewed from superhigh-  
ways, is desecrated by power lines. It can no longer be  
felt. The rivers are polluted by industry.

The paintable landscape of tradition was based on man,  
animal or mythological personage in relation to nature.  
It is no more. It died with the nineteenth century,  
and Cézanne, Monet and Van Gogh sang its funeral  
dirge. This humanized landscape, punctuated by farms,  
centered around a castle, spreading around the intimate  
focus of a church steeple, exists no more. Man no longer  
fights his personal struggle with nature as in a Brueghel.  
It is the machines that now exploit nature. We no  
longer overlook the battlefield from a hillock, but from  
a space satellite.

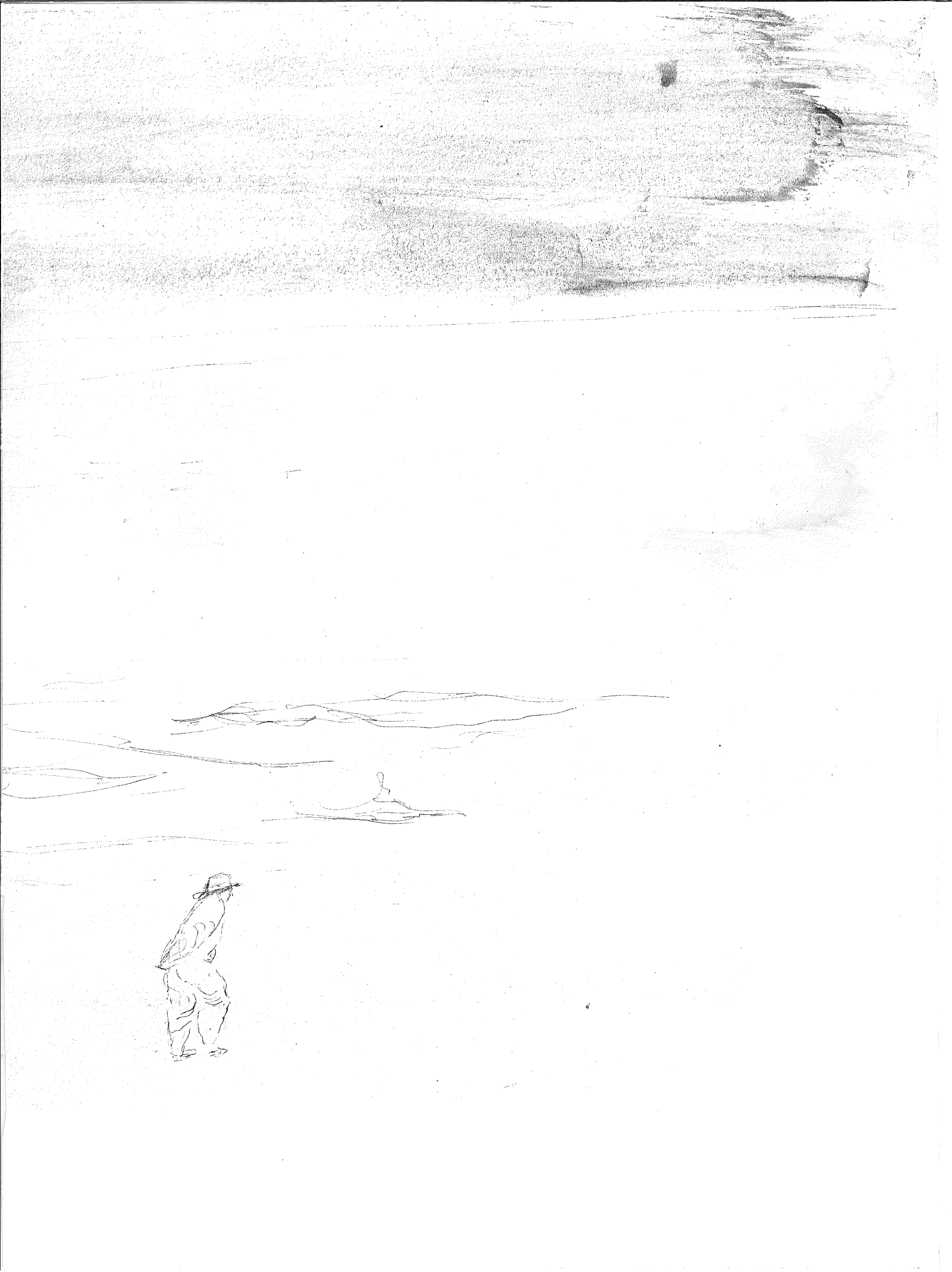
As subject matter the landscape often has become a  
nostalgic atavism or else a mere pretext for abstract  
exercises that no longer glorify nature, but exploit it—  
glorifying not the earth but man’s power to subdue  
it. Soon we will no longer be able to see nature except  
by paying formal visits to reservations and state parks,  
or, worse still, landscape will have been obliterated by  
the new insane means of massive destruction. Land-  
scape, too, has become transitory.

As nature in the form of landscape has disappeared as a  
subject of drawing and painting, so has the con-  
ventional still life. Where all articles are mass-produced,  
expendable and interchangeable, they have become  
unpaintable. What would a De Heem, a Chardin, have  
done with plastic pots? The table has been pulled from  
under the still life.







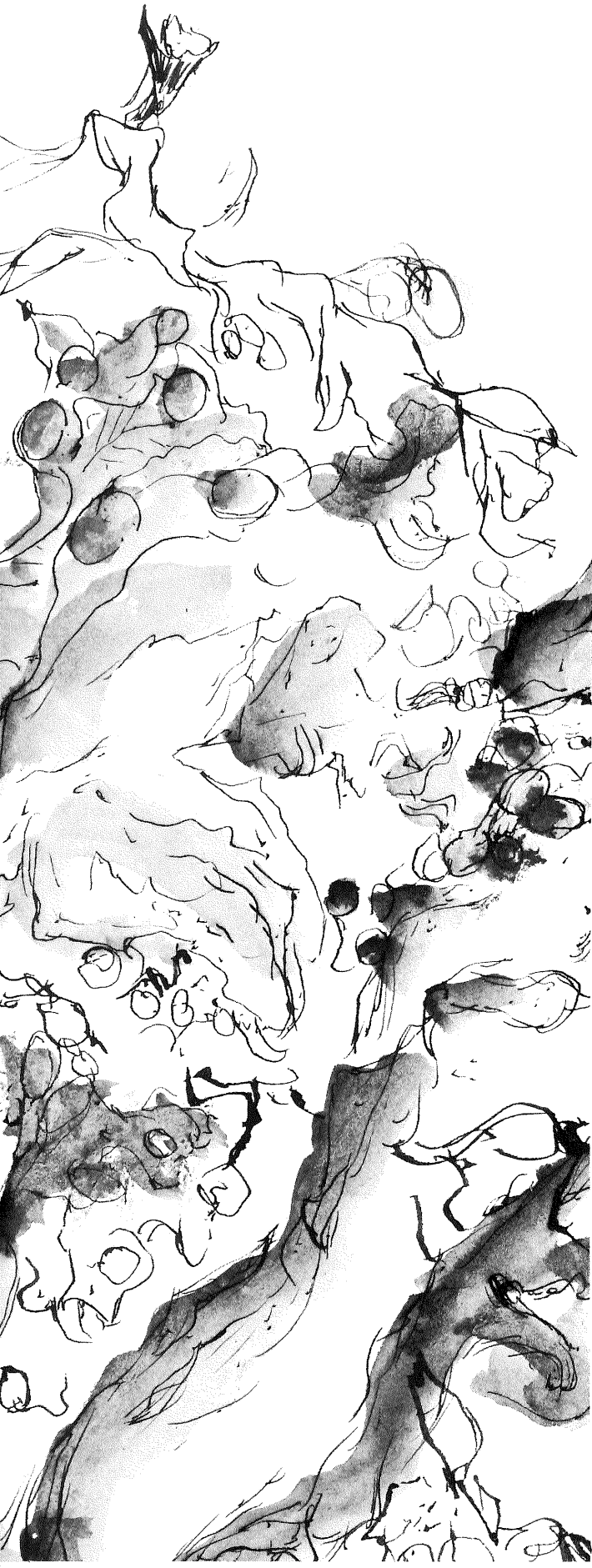


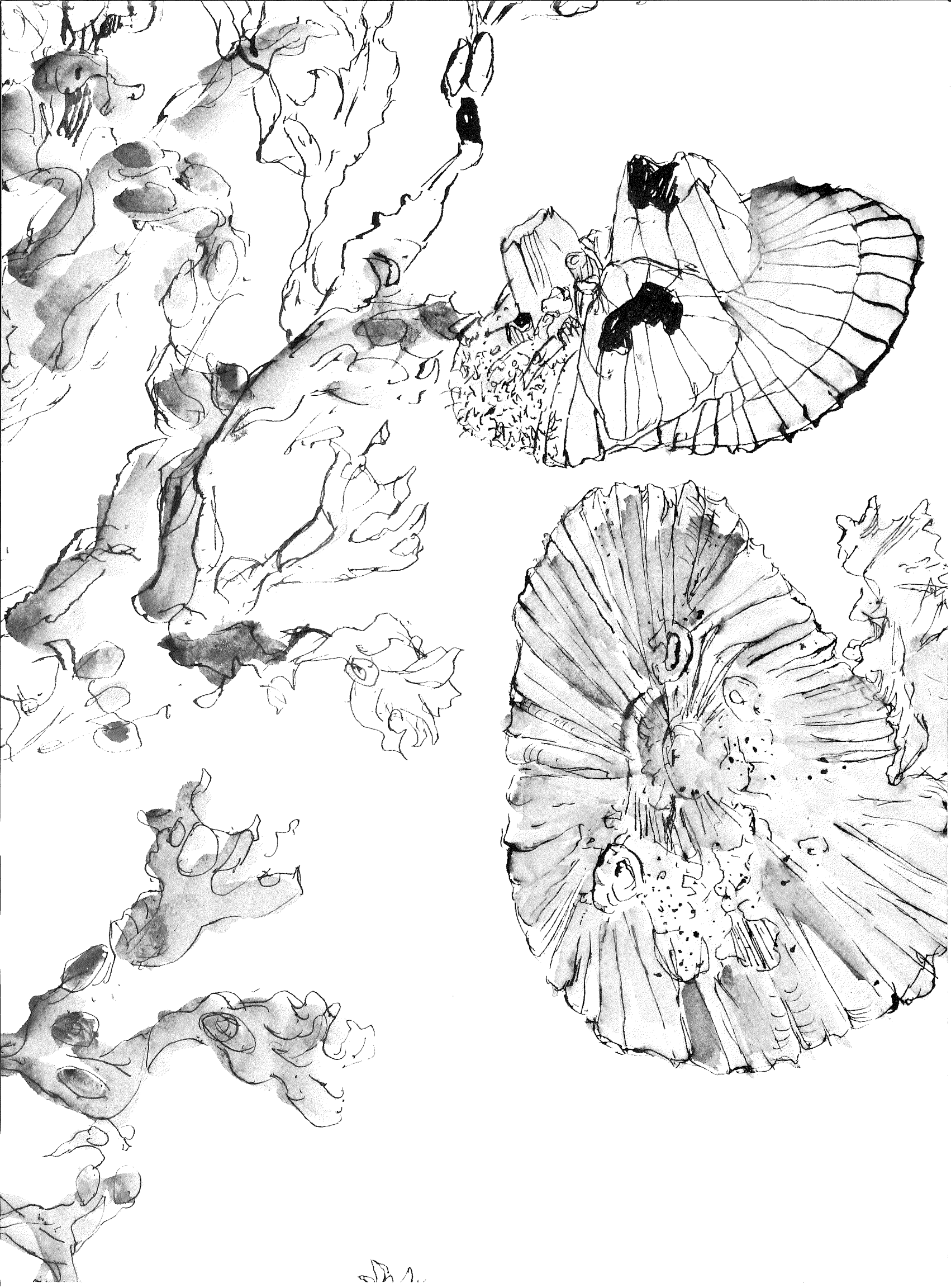
138 But on the beaches the still lifes are eternal, yet always changing. The shells are presented by nature in ever-varying compositions, beyond the arbitrary esthetic ones of man. On the beaches what is built or dug will be blown over, eroded, submerged, effaced by nature's bite beyond recognition, in the shortest time. Pieces of steel or concrete pylons are corroded, encrusted and ground down into natural objects. Trillions of life forms that have a contract with the life force for a short existence have their being and are drawn back into wave, foam, and sand, which is itself pulverized stone and powdered shell.

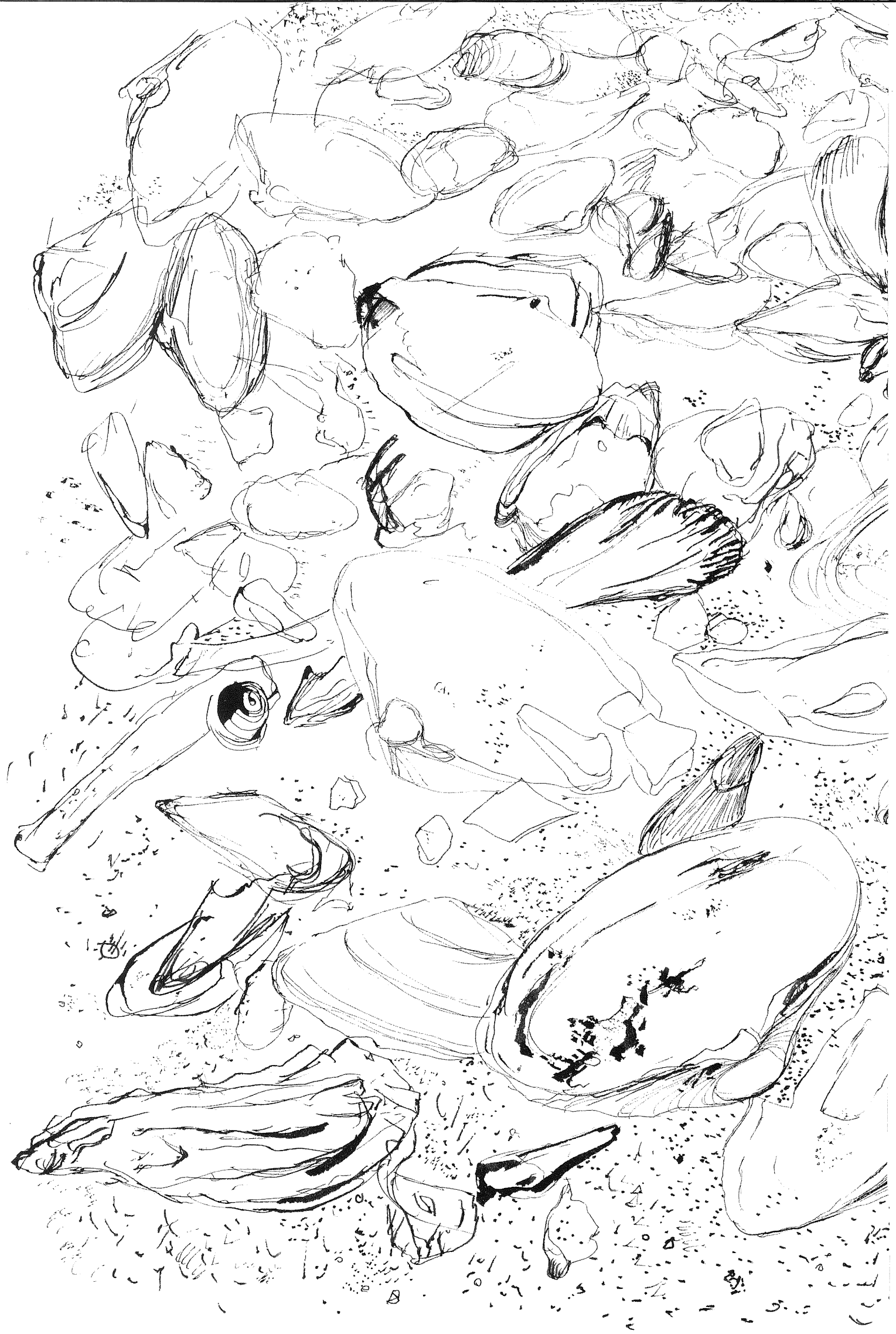
Even where a bomb has been dropped, the result is unnoticeable after a few years. Flotsam and jetsam—witness of plant and animal life and of the vanity of all man's efforts during his short life span—are thrown upon the beaches by wild waves and sucked back by the gentle, gigantic strength of the ebb tides. I have found ornamented parts of desks, all barnacled, at Plum Beach, and shell-encrusted overstuffed chairs on Rockaway; perfume bottles embedded in human excrement and oak ship lockers full of mussels on Staten Island; deep-sea monsters impaled on a Gothic railing in Cold Spring Harbor. The obscene tangles of Pacific seaweed with its intestinal coils and bladderlike floats, which choke the West Coast, speak of the adaptation of life to the most phantasmagoric conditions.

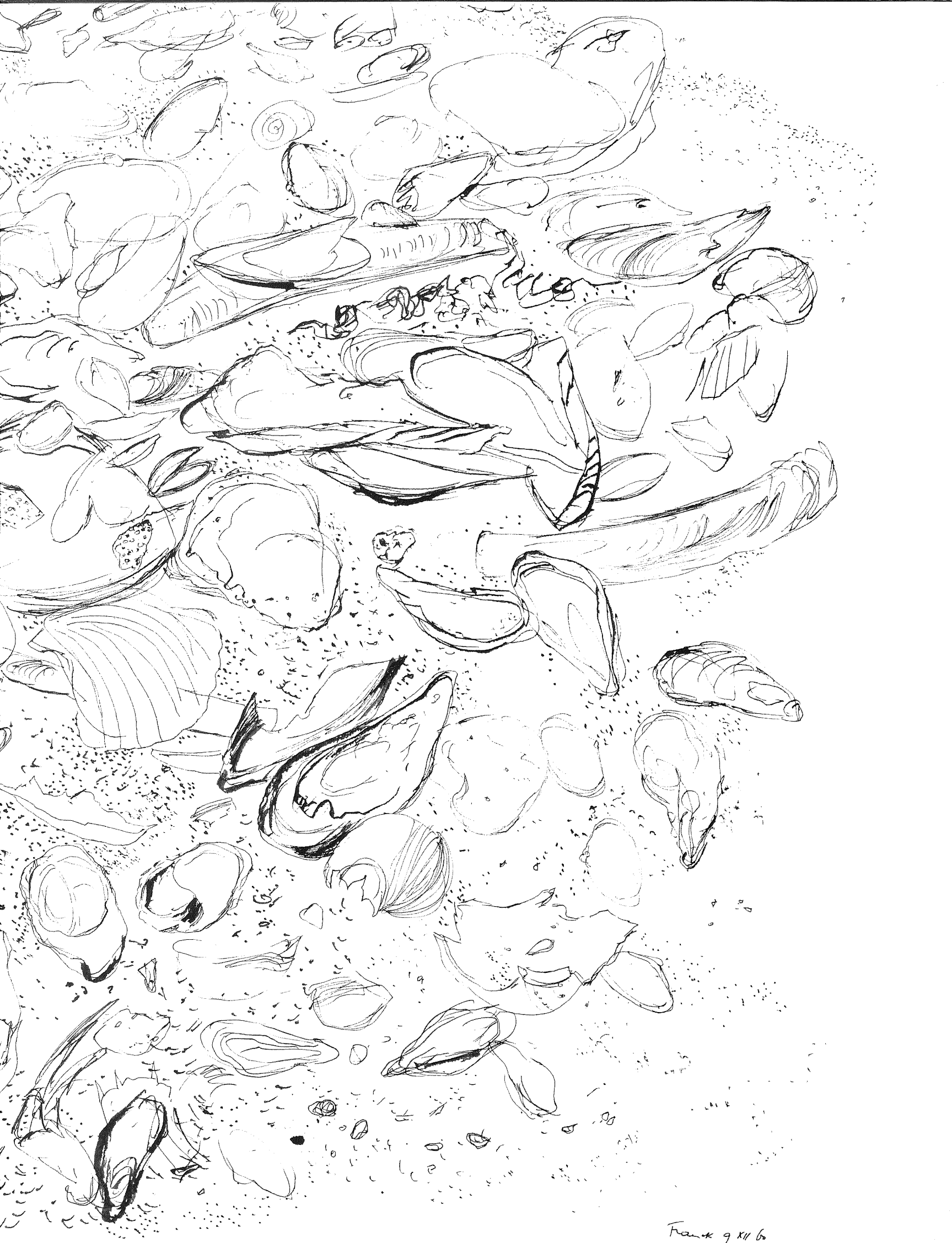
Where nature escaped me as landscape, I recaptured it on the beaches. I retrieved it as life itself, not abstractly but concretely, and as a source of wonder and inspiration.

I remember, a few years ago, walking along a beach in Holland and picking up shells by the dozen: the small, faint indigo, pink and buff shells of the Dutch seaside. They awakened memories of earliest childhood, when I used to walk, head down, along these beaches, picking up those wonders in the sand. "I still am that child!" it flashed through my mind, "I have not lost









Frank 9 XII 60

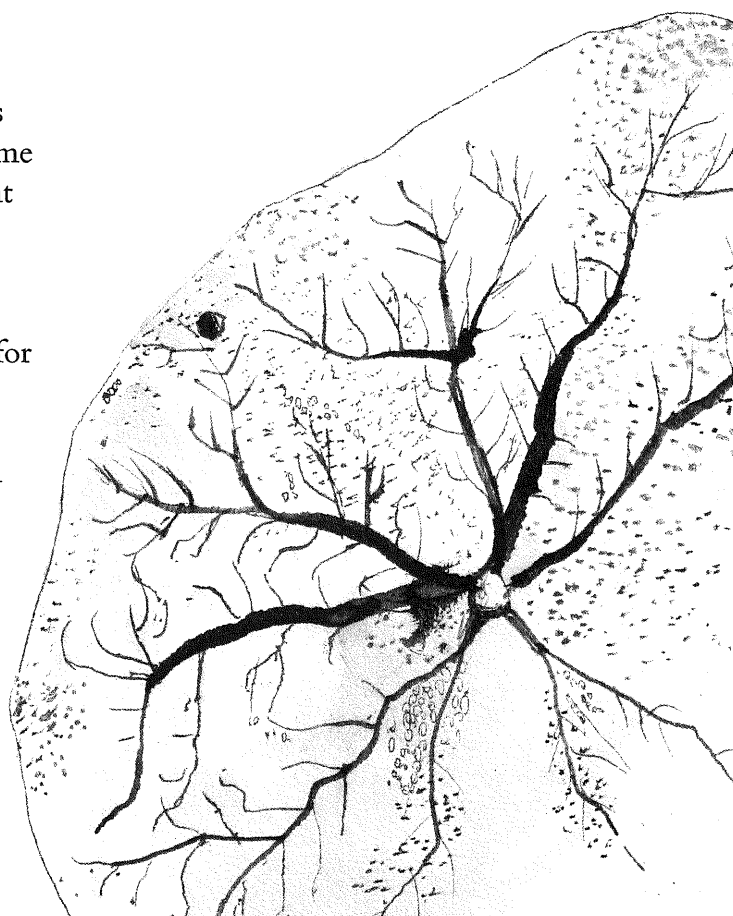
1 4 2 anything." I had recognized myself, I stuffed my pockets full of precious sand and shells and fragments of seaweed and returned to New York and my studio.

The dichotomy between drawing and painting that had plagued me during my whole life as an artist had come to an end.

Painting is such a different process! Whereas drawing is fast as lightning, a way of seeing, an aid to remembering, whereas drawing captures over-all truth of form and atmosphere in the mathematical sum of myriads of rapid shorthand strokes of pen or pencil, the very medium of paint makes painting slow. The treacly substance on the palette slows down the process of consciousness and awareness to a different mode of contemplation, slower but not necessarily more profound. For, while in drawing every flagging of concentration is visible in the negligence of a line, and every pretense of sensibility can be read in the transparent device that would cover it up, the slow process of painting invites other dangers. Thoughts will come up and interfere that are as likely to lead me astray into self-deception and intellectualization as they are to lead me into my truer self. The viscosity of the medium and its drying requirements tempt me to rumination, to conflicts between heart and brain. It is also harder to remain honest with myself in painting, because here I cannot make my own graphological analysis so instantly.

What just happened on the canvas all by itself, looks like a brilliant passage or form, remembered from some exhibition or reproduction. Such a delightful accident may seduce the painter and lead him on—lead him completely astray.

During the prolonged act of painting, there is time for the mind to conjure up imaginary artists, critics, gallery owners, who, looking over the painter's shoulder, whisper false suggestions into his ear. Then vanity, triviality and futility take over.









I 4 4 In drawing there is no limitation of subject. In painting I am forced to limit myself to that which has touched me so deeply, so genuinely, so existentially, that I can hold on to the vision while translating it into this slow and tortured medium.

But in the last few years, while painting beaches, seashells, flotsam and pebbles I seem to have hit this existential rock bottom. Where I shall go from here I do not know. All I know is that while I paint these beach forms, my gesture has become as natural as it is in drawing. My freedom is merely modified by the different fluidity of the medium.

Now there no longer is the search for style, for form, for color. There is an end to self-doubt. There is no need for the constant confirmation of exhibitions and "recognition." All worries about not being sufficiently conscious of my time have disappeared. The all-powerful dogmas that change every month have lost their power to frighten. The corrosive, abstruse theories of "space" as the ultimate subject of painting have showed their emptiness. The space that concerns art is the space *within* the artist.

In the shells I found a new beginning, a point of reference for all my feelings about nature. They have become condensations of the very process of living, growth precipitated in concentric dance movements of subtlest color.

Spontaneously the shells formed still lifes without a table, figure paintings without human figures. In painting them, hand and eye recalled innumerable tendernesses of color in a meditation that reconciled my maturity with my childhood. From this preoccupation with the magic of these humblest forms of nature I may perhaps branch out to what is more ambitious in scope. But ambition and scope are not all-important. Art is not a horse race or a golf tournament, although tastemakers may be anxious to pick—

or make—a winner. The artist's vocation is not to get there first, or to make something "approved," "good," but to speak to a human heart somewhere, sometime. Is it really important to be *avant-garde*? Does it nullify Bach that he wrote his most profound works in the traditional style, while "modernists" like Haydn were already acclaimed? Even where Bach wrote to entertain, his spiritual, cognitive quality—man transcends mere psyche—illuminates every phrase. The structure of the universe, the beat of the human heart are audible. I care not whether the artist is classified as great, major or minor, but listen whether his work speaks of awareness of the world and of himself. Then I call him artist, and feel a specific loving awe, whether he is famous or unknown, professional or Sunday painter, Picasso, Rembrandt or prehistoric cave man. I 4 5

The silence of the beaches taught me that the spiritual in art is not a separate ingredient, but its very foundation. It is a recording of an experience of reality that transcends mere sensation; an experience wherein all created things are seen in their true relationship. Each individual thing or creature is seen as a unique, separate aspect of the great organism, the continuum of life.

Here earth crust and atmosphere are felt as a continuous layer, enclosing the core of the earth. A globular layer of thoroughly live substance, metamorphosing itself into innumerable forms, shuttling as it were between the organic and the inorganic, between what is provisionally living and what is provisionally dead.

Of this layer I am a conscious particle. I am alive. Am humanly, am consciously alive: can perceive, can see, can feel and know that I perceive, see and feel; can speak in strings of sounds, in lines and dots and color.

One morning on the beach, with the ominous headlines from the papers still reverberating through my brain, I saw a vision.





FREDERICK FRANCK is an artist and writer whose drawings and paintings have been widely viewed in both his native Holland and adopted home, America. He has had numerous one-man shows; his work is part of the permanent collection of many museums here and abroad. Franck obtained medical and dental degrees in both Europe and America. He has journeyed to Africa to set up a dental clinic at Lambarene and work with Dr. Schweitzer during three consecutive summers on behalf of MEDICO-CARE. From his African travels resulted three books of the seven he has written: *Days with Albert Schweitzer*, *African Sketchbook*, and *My Friend in Africa*. *My Eye Is in Love* is Franck's seventh book. More recently, he has traveled twice to Rome to draw great events in the Vatican in 1962-1963. In appreciation of the drawings he made, the late Pope John XXIII conferred on Franck the medal of his pontificate. Dr. Franck and his wife make their home in New York City in a studio once inhabited by Edgar Allan Poe.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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